

FROM TRAIL TO RAIL

Surveys and Gold

1862 - 1904



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FROM TRAIL TO RAIL

Surveys & Gold

1862 to 1904

The story as told by people who were there.

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FROM TRAIL TO RAIL

Surveys & Gold

1862 - 1904

The story as told by people searching for gold, working on telegraph line construction and surveying for the Canadian Pacific Railway in the Peace, Nechako and Upper Fraser Rivers.

This booklet is part of the total manuscript called FROM TRAIL TO RAIL... FROM THE FIRST EXPLORER TO THE COMPLETION OF THE GRAND TRUNK PACIFIC RAILROAD, 1793 TO 1914.

Eye witness stories out of the 'Heart' of British Columbia.

Selected and introduced by

Audrey Smedley L'Heureux

Northern B.C. Book Publishing

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INTRODUCTION

FROM TRAIL TO RAIL Surveys and Gold 1862 to 1914

When gold was discovered at Barkerville in the early 1860's, and in the Klondike, in the late 1890's a new force became known to the land, and the Indian tribes located there. Front line waves of development assaulted this primitive land known today as the Central Interior of British Columbia. Fur traders, already well established, were joined by gold seekers in this vast area of mountains, rivers and a huge plateau.

Attracted to this treacherous frontier at this time – besides adventure seekers, goldseekers(Omineca goldfields discovered) and fur traders – came telegraph construction crews trying to create a “round the world” line, and Canadian Pacific Railway surveyors looking for a transcanada railway route.

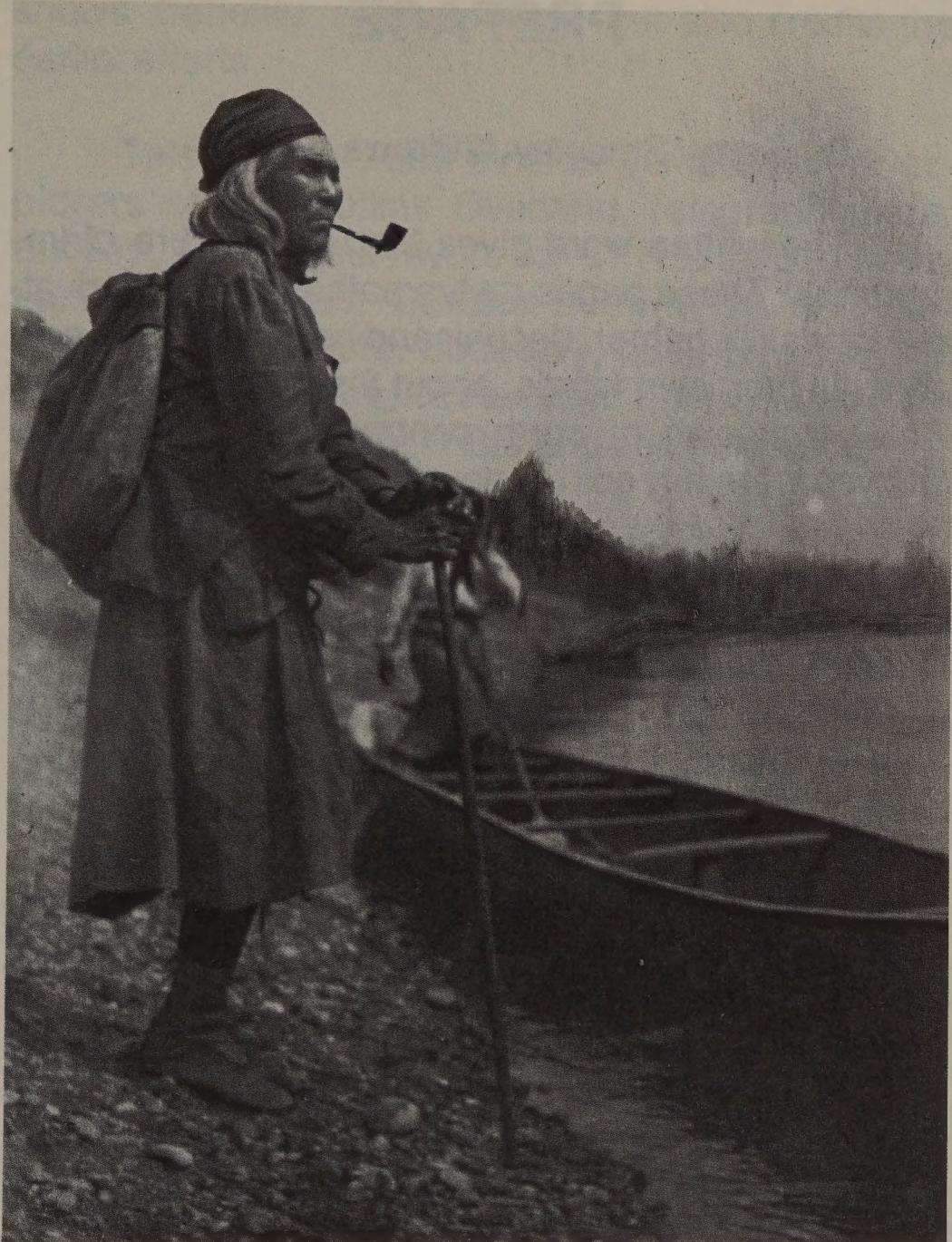
This book covers that period; 1862 to 1904. It is a companion publication to *FROM TRAIL TO RAIL: Settlement Begins 1905 to 1914* (released in limited edition, September, 1989) that continues the story on to railway completion and early settlement. Both books are from the total manuscript *FROM TRAIL TO RAIL . . . From the First Explorer to the Completion of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railroad, 1793 to 1914*. A hardcover book will hopefully target the 200th anniversary of Alexander Mackenzie's overland trip in 1993.

Acknowledgements were addressed in *Settlement Begins*. However, since all stories in these books are told in first person, by people that were there, a *permission to use* section accompanies each Chapter.

Excitement, adventure, compassion, humour, and description of Indian and frontier lifestyles greet the reader from the pens of people who were there.

As author/editor/publisher, I feel the development of this manuscript has complimented my past career in newspaper reporting and publishing in Northern British Columbia and appreciate the support and encouragement that has come my way in this endeavour.

AUDREY SMEDLEY L'HEUREUX



SIX MILE MARY. When Simon Fraser made his historic voyage of discovery down the river which bears his name, this Indian lady could have been on hand to speed him on his way. She was to become known as Six Mile Mary during the early settling of Fort George and when this picture was taken in about 1910, she was reputed to be 108 years old. She was the Great Grandmother of Mary John, as told in the book *Stoney Creek Woman*. Caption courtesy of The Citizen newspaper, Centennial Supplement July 20, 1971.

J. Simonson photo Courtesy Wally West.

PREFACE

By Gerry Smedley Andrews

The written word gives Man a measure of Immortality. These pages revive pathos, triumph, rivalry, friendship, humor, despair and hope of people now gone, in their own words, about their conquest of the Great Unknown of north central British Columbia. Motives were fur, gold, a new life, or adventure.

Travel by sea or freshwater allowed heavier loads than by land. Wind and current could help or hinder. Downstream was easier. Upstream required paddling, lining or poling. Land travel meant packing man or beast, trail finding, clearing and crossing streams. Food for man and beast was vital. Skill favored speed and survival. Ignorance invited disaster. Rivers were the primordial highroads, connected by brigade trails such as that between McLeod's Lake and Fort St James.

Geography sets the stage for History. Mariners Cook and Vancouver fixed the western limits of British Columbia with remarkable accuracy and detail, 1778-94. The first Geographers by land were fur traders: Alex Mackenzie, 1793; David Thompson, 1807-12; Simon Fraser, 1805-8; Samuel Black, 1824; John McLeod, 1834 and Robt Campbell 1837-8. They led the way for others, 1862-1904. Historic maps of BC include those by Arrowsmith(John), 1854; Trutch, 1871 and Mohun, 1884. Comparison with Map 1JR, 1960,

shows benefits of technology but also credits the earlier efforts.

This brief overture aims at perspective for explorers of the Collins Overland Telegraph under Bulkley, 1865-7; surveyors for CPR locations under Fleming, 1871-80; Dawson's work, 1876-7; surveyors on the Alaska Boundary, 1893-5 and on the BC-Yukon Boundary, 1899-1901. For buoyancy, the following gem by Hamlin Garland seems appropriate:

What have I gained by the toil of the trail?

I know and know well.

I have found once again the lore I had lost

In the loud city's hell.

I have broadened my hand to the cinch and the axe,

I have bared my flesh to the rain;

I was hunter and trailer and guide;

I have touched the most primitive wildness again.

I have threaded the wild with the stealth of the deer,

No eagle is freer than I,

No mountain can thwart me, no torrent appall,

I defy the stern sky.

So long as I live these joys will remain,

I have touched the most primitive wildness again.

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1862

OVERLAND TO GOLDFIELDS

Richard Henry Alexander

By 1858-59 we find that the same restless spirit which actuated miners in Australia and California was present here. Daring prospectors had penetrated far into the interior of British Columbia. In 1861, after laborious and hazardous journeying into the Cariboo, Williams and lightning Creeks, two of the most noted gold producers of British Columbia, were discovered. In the following few years most of the other rich creeks in Cariboo became known. Then began the gold rush which is the most notable event in the history of British Columbia and one which has had the most lasting effect in determining its future.

While Fort George ~~was~~ somewhat beyond the area covered by the "gold rush," it nevertheless shared in the excitement of the fortune seekers, some of whom passed by the old Fort on their way to or from the golden Cariboo. During the years from 1860 on, several parties of prospectors looking for new strikes ventured north past Fort George to the Peace and Finlay Rivers. Late in the summer of 1860 a party of four persons, T.M. Love, Thomas Clover(after whom Clover Bar near Edmonton was named), Alfred Perry and D.F. McLaurin, passed Fort George on their way up the river, prospecting as they went. They had spent some time in the Cariboo gold area and were carrying out sixteen hundred dollars worth of its gold with them. They were the first gold seekers to negotiate the Yellowhead Pass and travel east to the prairies, and news of their success was a factor in the organization of the Overlanders of 1862.

The excitement resulting from the bountiful presence of the precious metal extended in all directions, so that men gathered from every quarter. In 1862 it enticed many adventurous souls in Ontario to visit the

Overlanders

scene of the discovery, in the hope of bettering their fortunes. Many hundreds went round by Panama.

Stories have been told of how the people from San Francisco rushed up the Fraser River, often crossing the Gulf of Georgia in open boats; how others came up the tableland of the interior; how they crossed the Isthmus of Panama, and how they rounded the Cape. Victoria became a city in a day, and joined the Mainland to become a Crown Colony in 1866.

In the spring of 1862 London newspapers carried an advertisement by the "British Columbia Overland Transit Company" offering passage to Canada and transportation overland to the "rich gold fields" of British Columbia. Inexperienced clerks and gentry were told they could make a journey as arduous as Alexander Mackenzie's in sixty days, with little trouble or danger.

In Jasper, Alberta, there is a monument erected by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, which bears the following inscription:

"THE OVERLANDERS OF 1862

"Commemorating the courage and daring of the parties of goldseekers, numbering about 250, who in 1862, left their homes in Upper and Lower Canada and journeyed overland by way of Fort Garry and Edmonton to Kamloops and Cariboo, pioneering an immigrant road to British Columbia. The only organized overland immigration from Eastern to Western Canada prior to the era of railway.

A.D. 1939."

In May, 1862, several small parties left Ontario and Quebec and travelled through the American cities of Detroit, Milwaukee and St. Paul to the Red River settlement. After a long adventurous trek across the plains they reached the Rocky Mountains and crossed through the Yellowhead Pass, arriving at last at the head of navigation on the Fraser River, Tete Jaune Cache. Here, because of a shortage of provisions, thirty-six of the party went south to the head waters of the Thompson River, and after a perilous journey, they eventually reached Kamloops. Continuing downstream, they reached Lytton on October 25th, having lost two men by drowning on the journey.

The main party, under leadership of Mr. McMicking, entrusted their lives to the treacherous waters of the Fraser, using rafts, boats and canoes, which they had made at the Cache. Most of the rafts were about forty by twenty feet and carried all their supplies including a number of live oxen, which were lashed to the rafts. One of the rafts was eighty-five feet long and

Overlanders

twenty-two feet wide and carried nine head of oxen. Tragedy was in store for them at the Grand Canyon, some 100 miles above Fort George, where some of the canoes were capsized and two men drowned. A third, named Eustace Pattison, managed to escape drowning but suffered from exposure, and died the day after their arrival at Fort George.

A later party under Dr. Symington, following the ~~same~~ route, reached Fort George about the beginning of October, and a third contingent led by R.H. Alexander, after losing their boats with all supplies and one of their comrades in the swirling waters of the Grand Canyon, arrived at Fort George on October 8th.

At Quesnel they found crowds of disillusioned miners returning from Barkerville, and although they had travelled three thousand miles to look for gold, most of them decided to turn to other pursuits. They scattered to various places and a number eventually reached New Westminster or Victoria. A few, however, were determined to ~~see~~ the gold fields and set out for Barkerville.

Of the 193 who left Ontario in 1862, resident in British Columbia at the time of Sir Sandford Fleming's 1889 report, as far as was known, were J.A. Mara, Mr. and Mrs. Schubert, A. McNaughton, John Bowron, W. Fletcher, D. Simpson, Robert Heron, R.B. McMicking, W.H. Thompson, W. McKenzie, W. Halpenny, Geo.C. Tunstall, D. McQuarrie, R.H. Alexander, Capt. Redgrave, A. McConnell, J.B. McQueen, W. Fortune and J. Fan-nin (then curator of the Provincial Museum at Victoria to whom Sir Sandford Fleming said he ~~was~~ chiefly indebted for these names). The four last named, with Mr. and Mrs. Schubert, went down by the Thompson.

We will follow Richard Henry Alexander, from his Diary and Narrative as introduced by Neil Bearly for a limited edition book of 500 volumes printed in 1973.

Richard Henry Alexander arrived at Burrard Inlet in 1870 to take charge of the Hastings Mill Store. He remained in what became the city of Vancouver from that date until his death in 1915, the intervening years having seen him active in the establishment of civic government. This journal excerpt is taken, however, from an earlier, more arduous period in Alexander's life. "Attracted by the glowing accounts of the Gold Mines of British Columbia," he joined a party formed in Toronto for the purpose of travelling overland to the Cariboo. Upon arrival at Fort Garry, Alexander's party joined with other groups from Ontario and Quebec, becoming a part of the famous Overlanders of 1862. Their proposed six-week trip proved to be a nightmare

Overlanders

journey of nearly seven months' duration. Alexander's daily journal of the historic adventure, May to November 1862, forms the substance of the book this excerpt has been taken from.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 30th

On Tuesday the 30th we came to the first canyon. It is a dreadful place, the rocks coming down to the river's edge and the whole being a roaring rapid. There was a bend half way down the canyon where there was smooth water, and after getting the canoe down as far as that, we put our baggage in and paddled it across so as to save having to carry it round. We let the canoes down the first part with a long line. Carpenter and Jones paddled the first canoe across the bend, while I walked round to help get it down the rest of the canyon which was very bad, the rocks being nearly perpendicular.

As soon as Carpenter and Jones paddled across they went down to look how we were to get down, and when I reached the shore I waited till they came up. When they did so, Carpenter who had been managing the canoes all along, said, we could not get along the rocks to let the canoe down with the line, and that we would be obliged to run it. As I thought it rather dangerous I took off my boots and buckskin shirt before we started. We went at a tremendous rate for a short while when we got among some big waves and the canoe filled over the stern and went down. When it came to the surface again Carpenter was holding to the stern and I to the bow, the canoe than turned broadside to the current and rolled over and over. I then let go and swam for it. Carpenter I never saw again nor yet the canoe.

I was carried for a long way under water by the under current but I kept thinking it was not all up yet and resolutely kept my mouth shut till I would come to the surface and get another gulp of air and down I would go again. Sometimes I would be so long under water that I could scarcely hold my breath; at last I got down out of the boiling surf and the water though the rapid was smooth, I then began to keep myself better afloat, and began to swim for shore; at first I was underwater so much that all my exertions had been to keep my head above water; I was so much exhausted I had to swim on my back and lay gasping for breath, but I was quite cool all the time(the water was remarkable cold) and

Taken from *The Diary and Narrative of Richard Henry Alexander in a Journey Across the Rocky Mountains* edited by Neil Bearly, 1973 limited edition, with permission from The Alcuin Society.

Overlanders

managed to pull my shirt up out of my pants so as to let the water out. I had on heavy Canadian cloth pants. At last after swimming a distance of about three quarters of a mile I touched the shore but was so benumbed with the cold that I could not hold on to it, but drifted off again. Soon however, I made the shore again and dug my hands among the pebbles and pulled myself out of the water and lay there.

There was an island just below the canyon and the current carried me down between it and the right shore(all the others were on the left). After I recovered a little I made my way over the rocks, and this with bare feet was pretty hard work, up to where the others on the opposite side were portaging the baggage and I asked them if they could get me across, but they said, they dared not cross at the eddy in case of being carried down into the lower canyon where we had filled and where the line(being the only remaining hope to get the canoe down that part), was lost with our canoe; so down I had to go to the foot of the canyon again and after running about to try and warm myself a little, I jumped into the water again and swam across. Before swimming the second time I stripped off the remainder of my clothes and left them there. I was so cold that I could not close my fingers and had to swim with my hand open. Oh I never knew what it was to be thankful to God before as when I tottered up that bank, and ever since in all our troubles and dangers I have been able to place more dependance on Him and leave it all to His good pleasure. I forgot to tell you that Carpenter wrote something in his diary just before starting, which on examination proved to be the following as near as I can recollect "Arrived this day at the canyon at 10 a.m. and drowned running the canoe down; God keep my poor wife." Was it not strange? He was not much of a swimmer and clung to the canoe which I think was sucked down and held under the rocks, at least we never saw it again(so you see I have to be very thankful that Papa made swimming a part of my education). The other canoe they set adrift to give it a chance of coming down itself, but they could not get it out of the eddy. Well here we were without a canoe and at least 200 miles from Fort George with very little provision(only eight ground hog between us), flour we had run out of before we reached the river. We went at once upon rations, the allowance being one ground hog a day, each man getting a piece about the size of your hand. We calculated this would last us eight days in which time we expected to reach Fort George.

We had to abandon most of our things here as everything had to be packed on our backs. It was awful work as there was no trail, and the rocks came down like a wall in many places to the river which forced us to go back in-

Overlanders

land, and climb over the hill through brush so thick that we could hardly make our way through it, and some places we came down we could not have done so unless there had been trees, we having to swing ourselves from one to another, it being so steep.

Toward evening we saw a canoe on the opposite side and we camped there. Next morning they wanted me to swim for the canoe, but the river was wide here and I was both weak and ill with the last two days work, so I would not venture it, we accordingly shouldered our packs again, but had not gone far when we came to a rock that would have forced us to go a long way back from the river, and saw then that we would never make our way down by land, so we went back some distance till we found a suitable tree and made a raft; Jones and I then crossed and brought the canoe over. It proved to be our second canoe which must have come down during the night. It would however, only hold two and what baggage we had; so we had to walk on the bank.

We went for a couple of days this way, but with the small amount of provisions, and the labour of forcing our way through the bush, we were getting done up. At last I hit upon a plan to make the canoe carry us all. We felled another tree and lashed a log on each side and found it answered admirably.

On the second day from this in the midst of a violent snowstorm (October 5th) we came upon an Indian Camp. We made signs to them that we were starving, but they would give us nothing and we had to take ourselves off, giving our shirts to trade for dried beaver. They told us they were going down to Fort George next day that it was two days journey from this, and that there were bad rapids above there. After getting what provisions we wanted we left and camped a few miles further off.

Next day it blew so hard and raised such a sea, that after going a mile we were obliged to stop as we were shipping water at a great rate. In a short while the Indians came along and wanted us to go down along with them, and finally two of us arranged to go with them for a shirt apiece while Jones and I paddled our own canoe. After a little difficulty in the rapids we got an Indian to run the canoe down for us.

Our party arrived at the Fort on the second night but Jones and I did not get in till the next morning. We found there that we would have to go to the mouth of the Quesnelle. We traded Alfred Handcock's gun with the Factor of the Fort for provisions and got a splendid canoe from an Indian for a revolver that had belonged to Carpenter.



Overlanders rafting through the Grand Canyon of the Upper Fraser River encountered the same challenges as 1913 rafters shown here.

J. Simonson photo Courtesy Wally West.

1865

COLLINS OVERLAND

Col. Chas. S. Bulkley

About this time a large scale enterprise was entered into that, although it would fail in its own objective, served to open hundreds of miles of wilderness in Central British Columbia to exploration.

Following the second failure to lay a trans Atlantic cable in 1858, Perry McDonough Collins, an American, interested the United States government in a plan to connect America and Europe by means of a telegraph line . . . this line to pass through British Columbia and Alaska to Siberia where it would connect with the already existent Russian installation. An American firm, the Western Union, took up the project and Colonel C.S. Bulkley of the United States army was appointed Engineer-in-Chief.

The scheme was daring because most of the country through which the line would go was unexplored, there was no skilled labour there and the supplies and tools for the enterprise would have to be transported by ship from the Atlantic coast, round the Horn or through Magellan Strait. But the idea, once accepted, was followed up energetically and was organized competently.

A franchise was secured from the B.C. Legislative Council and work began in the spring of 1865 on the Collins Overland Telegraph. Work went on simultaneously in B.C., in Russian America and in Siberia. The Western Union was brought into New Westminster and the first message over it told of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, April 18, 1865.

On September 27, 1943, at Vancouver, B.C., the Vancouver Board of Trade sponsored a luncheon for American Army officials to celebrate the completion of the Alaska Highway, another joint American-Canadian endeavor. On this occasion a presentation was made to the City of Vancouver

Collins

by Brigadier General O'Connor. He gave the City a copy of the *Journal and Letters of Col. C.S. Bulkley, U.S. Army Telegraph Trail Expedition 1865-1867*. At the time, the original journal was in the possession of the Portland Public Library. A copy of this journal is presently held at the Vancouver Public Library, North-West Room, which is likely[no record of its acquisition] the same journal. At this same time copies were presented to the Hon. John Hart, Premier of British Columbia and W.L. MacKenzie King, Prime Minister of Canada.

From this journal, a report of Col. Chas. Bulkley's is taken. It is dated July 25th, 1865, comes from the Steamer "Geo. S. Wright," Victoria, and is addressed to the Executive Committee, Rochester, N.Y.

Since my last report the building parties have been pushing steadily forward up Frasers river, the British Columbia and Siberian explorations started, vessels purchased and fitted for our service, teams, wagons, arms and supplies procured, contracts for poles entered into, with general preparation and organization for the future sc. The delay and expense occasioned by the unwilling disposition of the Navy Department to favour us has been the source of great annoyance, and leaves us very late to prosecute the work I propose in high latitudes during this summer.

Mr. Conway, on the Fraser's river line, has four hundred miles of poles on the ground, two thirds of which are up, and the line being rapidly finished with wire, that part between the Cascade mountains and New Westminster, probably the most difficult to build of our whole line, is nearly finished, and the cable is already laid across Fraser's river. The long passage of the Milton Badger with material and stores has delayed him considerably in his work. This summer he will forward supplies to Babine Lake, preparatory to winter work, and will also endeavour to open lines of communication through the Stikeen and Nasse rivers, intersecting our route well north.

The British Columbia exploring party, numbering thirty men, with forty pack mules, properly supplied, are ordered to divide for side explorations, espe-

From *Journal and Letters of Col. C.S. Bulkley, U.S. Army Telegraph Trail Expedition, 1865-1867*. Bound, photocopied volume, Northwest Room, Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver, British Columbia. Permission to use from Library Association of Portland, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. where original is kept.

Collins

cially of our line of water communication, ■ the greater part of these men and mules will return to the head waters of Fraser's river before winter, and only ■ few will forward to Fort Yucon. The party is made up of voyagers and Hudson Bay Co employees, in charge of Dr. D.T. Rothrock, Robert Binnie and Frank Pope. When last heard from they were above Fort Alexander, pushing towards the Dease House establishing depots and arranging with the Indians for supplies. Binnie is ■ old Hudson Bay man, ■ native of the country and has had more experience upon our proposed route than any ■ man on this coast.

The Siberian party, consisting of Serge Abasa in charge, with ■ engineer, and four others sailed on the Russian brig "Olga" for Petropaluski and mouth of the Amoor river with supplies, prepared to make ■ reconnaissance of the route and immediately commence the work by collecting poles on any portion determined. Mr. Abasa should go first to the mouth of the Amoor that he may confer with the headquarters of the government of the sea coast provinces and procure from the governor the proper orders to subordinate officials. One or more of his party will be left at Petropaluski and proceed north to Anadynsk in order to make preparation for the party from Bering Sea, via the Anadyr river.

I have purchased the barques Palmetto and Golden Gate, and the steamer George S. Wright for the company, but was obliged to have bills of sale made to myself as agent, in order to get the proper papers executed at the custom house. The Palmetto is on her passage to Emma Harbor in Bering Sea laden with coal; the Golden Gate is at sea bound to Sitka, laden with stores, and I have the steamer George S. Wright here. The schooner Milton Badger is here also, having been repaired in Victoria and loaded with coal and stores, will sail for Anadyr Bay. The barque Clara Bell is probably at Sitka, and will when I arrive, sail for New Westminster with the wire and supplies that she has for Conway's division. The first three vessels have been fitted for our peculiar service and supplied at San Francisco, and ■ all saleable at ■ price equal at least to that paid.

Mules, harness, wagons, tools, commissary stores and arms have been purchased for building and exploring service. These purchases were made necessary by the long passages on our vessels from New York.

For the country near Bering Strait that is destitute of timber, it will be necessary to furnish poles, and I have contracted for ■ quantity to be sawed at the mills on Puget Sound this summer, and piled, so that they may be well seasoned and light in the spring.

My organization is military in its character, requiring officers and men both in the land and marine service to wear uniform without cost to the company; and our system of accounts is similar to the quartermaster's department of the army.

Collins

With the local inhabitants and Indians I find such an organization desirable and one which can be controlled much more satisfactorily than any other.

The most expensive part of our line will be through the gold bearing region of British Columbia; once out of that we find more industrious Indians and can carry in whites with less extravagant ideas of the value of labour. In Siberia the cost of construction will be small.

We should have in the spring as early as April 1st, at San Francisco a good steamer of not less than six hundred tons burthen; she should have large spars and sails, be a light pole burner and if possible, with a propeller that will unship and hoist up.

I trust that all my material will be here early, and that the delay of this will be more than balanced by early movement in the next year; it is possible that this detention has been a "blessing in disguise," thereby escaping the Shenandoah.

Wm B. Hyde, a civil engineer, I have chosen as my first assistant; he will be thoroughly conversant with my plans and the general direction of the enterprise, and now on board of the Golden Gate in charge of the land parties, destined for the Bering Strait region.

Edward Conway, now in charge of the Fraser's river division, is energetic, active, intelligent, and in every respect worthy of your confidence and esteem.

In securing the services of Mr. Abasa, I believe we are very fortunate; his knowledge of the people, language, customs, laws, and his interest in the work, together with the position of his family in Russia, are all of the utmost importance; and I purpose in the future, with a proper corps of assistance to give him charge of the work in Siberia.

I intend if possible, in the short summer left me, to explore the country from the head of Grantley Harbor to Norton Sound on the east side of Bering Strait, and from the head of St. Lawrence Bay to Anadyr River on the west side, also to make soundings out of these bays and across the northern parts of Bering Sea. A party will go up the Anadyr River to connect with Abasa and another up the Kuetchpack towards Fort Yucon, and if possible during the winter, to push down to the head waters of Fraser's river: I shall also examine the country around the head of Norton Sound, and establish depot with supplies at Fort St. Michael for the purpose of winter exploration.



Courtesy Ashton Fletcher Andrews collection. He had a framed enlargement of this photo at Medicine Hat which was labelled "Stoney Creek Charlie, over 100 years old." Charlie's life span could thus be c1805-1905. About 1905 Andrews travelled CPR to Ashcroft, stage coach to Soda Creek, sternwheeler to Fort George. Photo thanks to Gerry Smedley Andrews. G.M. Dawson mentions □ 'Stoney Creek Charlie' in the Nechako country, 11 August-2nd Oct., 1876.

1865

BULKLEY HOUSE

Dr. J. T. Rothrock

From time to time in the *Journal and Letters of Col. C.S. Bulkley, U.S. Army Telegraph Trail Expedition 1865-1867* we come across names that have remained with us. Col. Bulkley left his name to a river, a valley and Bulkley House (at one time a stopping place) on Takla Lake, north of Fort St. James.

For an account of the latter we are indebted to one Dr. Joseph Trimble Rothrock(1839-1922), a botanist who would, later in life, come to be regarded as the father of forestry in Pennsylvania. In 1913 he wrote a letter to Mr. E.O.S. Scholefield, provincial librarian and archivist of Victoria at the time. This letter gives us the pleasure of a first hand account of the building of Bulkley House, but there is also much more of interest here.

His account of Indian rituals and how deeply impressed he was, is rare. Whether his reports of the rituals are valid, might be questioned, considering the time gap between when it happened and when he told it. Note, however that he apparently had notes he was referring to. At any rate there is little doubt about his own reaction, empathy still being with him when he put it on paper.

Rothrock was in a party under command of Major F.L. Pope, of Massachusetts, in 1865, when these events occurred. Pope was engaged in making explorations in the country lying between the head of Fraser River and Bering Strait, in order to determine the most practicable route for the

1913 letter from Dr. Joseph Trimble Rothrock to E.O.S Scholefield, British Columbia Provincial Archivist with permission from Mrs. Henry[Helen] Rothrock Jr. West Chester, Pa.

Bulkley House

telegraph line. Rothrock had signed on for the sum of \$13. a month, with the prospect of travelling 700 miles carrying a 50 pound pack, along with gun, blanket and axe, so great was his interest in the outdoors and plants.

It is interesting to note that the route Bulkley House ~~were~~ on, which was being considered for the Collins Overland Telegraph, is that of the present (contentious) British Columbia Railway[previously Pacific Great Eastern] extension from Fort St. James to Dease Lake.

From Dr. Rothrock's letter:

August 17th.

Had a good 4-knot breeze in our favor up the lake, so we made a sail by pinning our blankets together with wooden pins and hoisted these on oars which did duty as masts. We lay down in the boat and in a few hours reached the head of the lake. We selected a spot for our house on the eastern side of the lake, just south of the edge of the delta made by the river which came in from the north. A fine little stream came down close by, from the highlands[now on the map as the Omineca Mountains] to the east of the house.

The ground had long been a camping ground for the Indians. It was high enough to be comfortably dry, yet close to the lake. A forest fire had, a few years before, destroyed most of the timber, which was spruce, and scrub or lodge-pole pine. It was still standing dead and dry, in good condition for building purposes and for fuel. The situation gave us a fine outlook on the lake and across the lake. To the west, across the lake, was a symmetrical treeless peak, so like a pyramid that the name of Cheops was at once suggested and accepted for it, in spite of the fact that the great pyramid builder of Egypt had scant claim to remembrance in the western world.

There was sufficient skill in our party to build a reasonably attractive house, though we had by this time been reduced to about half the number with which we reached Fort St. James. All whose services could be dispensed with were sent back from that point. Feeding a large party at Lake Tatla was a serious problem. Our chief difficulty was lack of proper tools. Mr. Blenkinsop of Victoria, always one of the most valuable men in the party, in this emergency gave fresh proof of his value. His long experience in the service of the Hudson Bay Company, added to his natural ability, ripened him for any duty. Beyond axes, a few augurs, a drawing knife and a pit saw, I do not now remember that we had any other tools. There may have been a jack plane, but of this I am not sure.

Bulkley House

The ground selected for the house was speedily levelled and the work of logging up the walls commenced. As I now remember it, the house was about 35 feet by 20 feet, and of a single story with a loft above. There were two rooms. The kitchen was entered directly from the front door. A large table and plain benches occupied the centre. There was a pantry for tinware, cooking utensils, etc., and double berths stateroom fashion, i.e., one above the other, for eight men. The office was entered from the kitchen and the huge chimney with one fire place opening into the kitchen and one opening into the office, occupied the centre of the ground floor and in part served as a partition between the two rooms. The windows were of the skins of caribou, oiled after the hair had been removed, and though they did allow a certain amount of light to enter, we were constantly reminded that there existed a difference between translucency and transparency. As the work advanced, it became evident that the slow process of pit sawing was necessary to obtain the few boards that seemed to be absolutely required for furniture, window frames, etc. It is worth while to add that in the erection of the large chimney we had nothing nearer to a mason's hammer than an old "pole axe", and that a stiff clay mud did duty for mortar. The floor was of closely hewed logs, as was also the ceiling which divided the lower rooms from the loft. About six feet wide was partitioned off from the office to serve as a store room. The roof was given a steep slope to hurry the water off, as our only cover was hewn poles covered with long grass laid shingle fashion, and then covered with a layer of well stamped soft clay. This roof retained the heat, but did not entirely prevent a muddy shower coming through during a heavy rain fall. However, we were fairly comfortably housed.

August 27th the first snow fell on Cheops and the other distant peaks across the lake. With us at the lake it was a cold rain and reminded us of the need of haste in house building.

August 30th we had a heavy frost and ice. Thermometer at breakfast time was 29 degrees Fahr.

August 31st. Thermometer at noon in sun 100 degrees and the range of temperature of the day by bed time was 75 degrees. In spite of this, we had during the hotter parts of the day the usual swarm of mosquitoes!

September 2nd. There was a remarkable mirage over the lake. We thought in it that we recognized Major Pope and his boat coming, and as the evening settled down dark, a huge fire was built on the shore of the lake to guide him to the camp.

Sept. 4th. Major Pope and Birney reached camp.

Sept. 9th. Hudson Bay Clerk, Mr. Alexander from Connnelly's Lake, en route to Fort St. James reached here, and from him we obtained much information.

Bulkley House

Sept.11th. Snow fell ~~as~~ low down ~~as~~ 600 feet above lake level.

Sept.14th. Pope and Scoville determined magnetic variation to be something under 29 degrees

Sept.15th. Range of temperature to-day between morning and noon 57 degrees.

Sept.22nd. Ducks are moving south. For several days we have had rain, rain, rain. Everything about camp wet and cheerless.

Sept.28th. Rain fell in torrents. "Nothing doing."

Sept.30th. Cottonwood leaves falling. Geese gone south.

Oct. 4th. Pope and myself crudely estimate Bulkley House to be about 2400 feet above tide. Fresh lot of ducks and geese have come. Birney and I have shot quite a number.

Oct. 15th. Started to-day with Birney, Yates, Hunter and Vittell for Stuart's Lake to bring up the last of our winter provisions-if the lateness of the season allows us to get it up, House is finished. Reached Fort St. James on Stuart's Lake on October 19th in spite of much bad weather and head winds.

After a rest of a day or two, the boat was loaded with our stores and we started on our return trip, reaching Bulkley House just before the cold weather would have closed the more sluggish portions of the Stuart River. The one thing of that trip which most impressed itself on my mind was the cold nights, ice ~~a~~ quarter of ~~an~~ inch thick forming, and the intolerably hot noons with the hordes of mosquitoes from noon until dusk. After each cold night we thought the end of the insect scourge had been reached. I think, however, it was well on in November before they left ~~us~~ finally.

On or about November 15th, in company with some Hudson Bay employees, I started from Bulkley House for the post at the head of Connelly's Lake. We were five days on the trip. We were not then specially hurried and we made short marches and did considerable hunting. The first day we halted to "work a beaver", that is to capture one in a net placed under the ice after all the escape holes in the bank had been closed by stakes, and the dam and house broken. After several hours of work we captured a fine one and immediately it was skinned, the ill-scented glands removed, cut up and placed in the kettle to boil. A beaver trap was set and during the night another beaver was caught. As soon as the meat was boiled, we all "set to" eating. To be sure, it was not much of ~~an~~ undertaking for the six of us to finish the animal at a sitting, though if it had been twice or thrice as large, there would have been no end of gorging until a limit had been reached. That is the Indian habit. Feast while you can, starve when you must.

During this first night it unexpectedly became bitterly cold. The sudden

Bulkley House

lowering of the temperature caused the timber to set up a fusillade of reports that was a not inapt reminder of an attack on a picket, or a skirmish line. It was to me quite new and surprising. I became used to it later, but never again heard such a continuous series of very loud reports.

Before reaching Connelly's Lake ■ deep snow fell. Two of our party had snowshoes and moved more readily than those who followed along without them.

The Hudson Bay Post at Connelly's Lake consisted of ■ small living house and, I think, a couple of small out buildings. There were some Atnah Indians there when we arrived. A band of Siccanees came in the next day. It was impossible not to note the difference in these Indians. The Atnahs were short, stout, indolent, and as a rule, none too honest. The Siccanees were ■ hardy race of hunters, living in the more rugged mountain region. They were alert, active, thin, sinewy and generally honest.

I wish here to record ■ fact that is hard to believe, but is nevertheless true. There was ■ band of Indian children (Atnahs I think) engaged in snow-balling on the snow-covered ice, and though they were barefooted and had but little else than ■ "breech clout" on, they did not seem to suffer from the cold. No doubt there are among the Hudson Bay men, those who can confirm this statement which seems so incredible.

Whilst at Connelly's Lake I attended the funeral of a Siccanee lad. After this there was ■ "feast", to which I was invited. We were all seated around the walls of the lodge, the guests on bearskins. A fire was burning in the centre, the smoke going out through an opening in the roof.

After ■ brief silence, pipes were produced and (with tobacco which I furnished) passed to the young men, who filled the pipes and passed them around to their elders, after which bear and beaver meat were put into the boiling water to cook. In the meanwhile, those who knew the dead lad rehearsed his virtues. The chief Sac-cad-e-ash distributed some bear's grease, saying that the animal had been killed by him, according to the custom, with some powder of a dead friend. When the meat was cooked, it was evenly divided among those present, who ate what they could and carried what remained with them to their quarters.

The blankets of the dead lad were torn up and divided among the friends and guests; so too the shot and powder were distributed. After the feast Sac-cad-e-ash thanked me for coming and said that henceforth I was his friend! I wish to add that his subsequent action showed the sincerity of his declaration.

It may not be regarded ■ irrelevant to allude to ■ meeting which followed the funeral feast and was probably regarded ■ a part of it. In the evening, after dark, we assembled again in the lodge. In all there were probably thirty or forty

Bulkley House

who were adults, or nearly so. Most of them were males; though there were a few middle-aged, or old women. There was a bright fire burning in the middle of the lodge. When it was thoroughly dark and it was supposed that all who were entitled to come, or who cared to come, were present, one of the oldest women came forward. Her hair was loose and streaming down over her face and shoulders, her breast was exposed. A loon skin, dried and split lengthwise, was drawn down over her head, around her neck, with the bird's bill hanging down in front. In her hand she held a large rattle made of raw hide and in it were several pebbles.

Everything being ready, the fire was so extinguished as to leave just enough light to enable one to grope around the lodge to where the woman sat on the ground. Suddenly she gave a piercing scream in imitation of the loon whose skin she wore, and began a low, monotonous song, keeping time with the rattle. Gradually the song became louder and faster and she swayed to and fro, interrupting the song more frequently with the loon call. It was not long before she was in appearance worked into a frenzy. The inmates of the lodge had caught the excitement from her and were now joining in the song, screams and contortions. I found myself singing in company with the rest. The darkness inside the lodge, and the pandemonium there, the wilderness, the lake, the mountains outside, all dimly but suggestively seen, conspire to make that the most unearthly night of my life. It seems now, after an interval of forty-seven years, like a dreadful dream, a nightmare.

The noise continued until the old woman, the priestess, the central figure, was halted by exhaustion. Then some one came forward and on bended knees before her received the benediction and the protection against disease, which came as she muttered the mystic words over his head and passed her fingers through his hair.

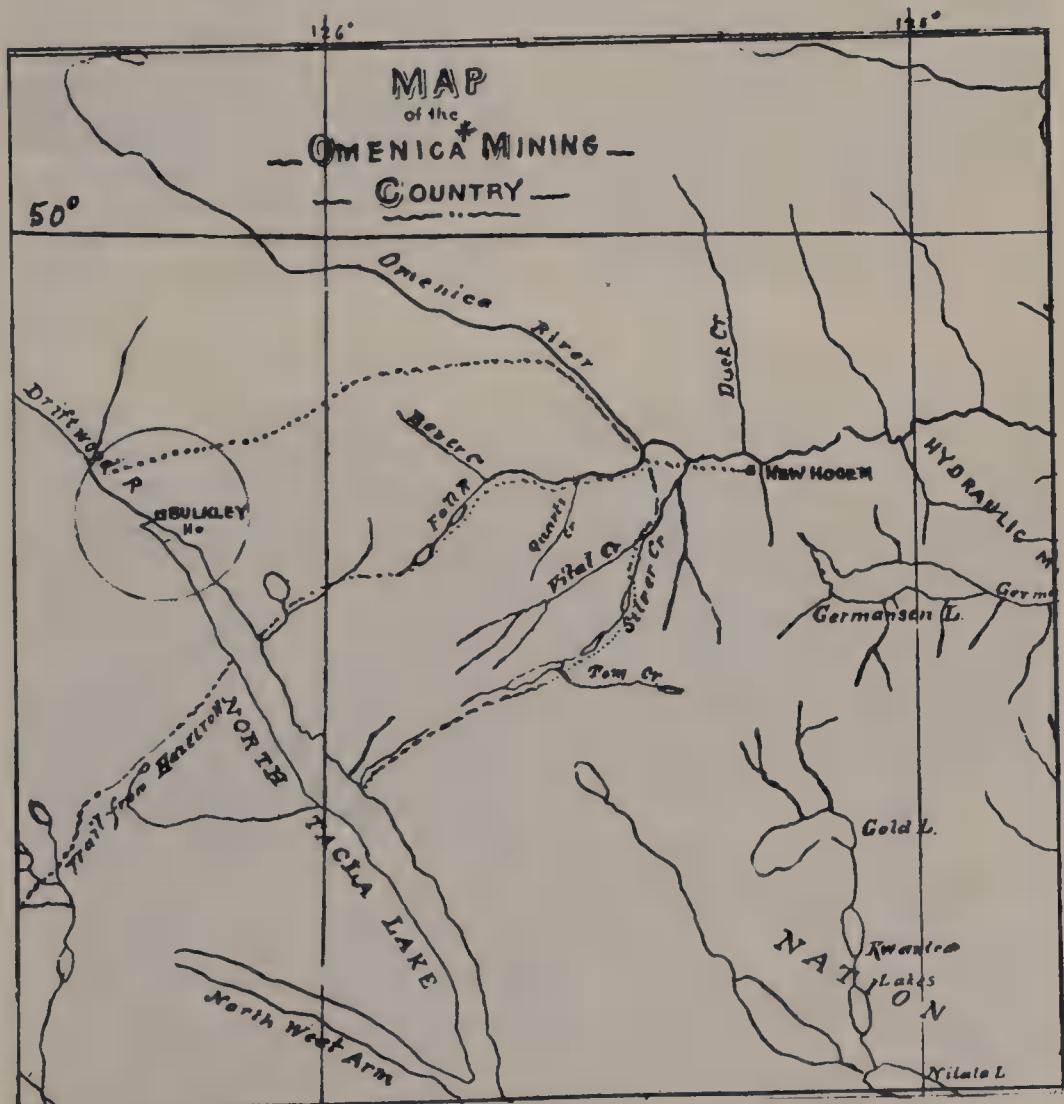
I noticed that those present were coming in turn and that I would soon be the one to step forward. When my turn came I hesitated a minute, and a Cree Indian, who was my guide and interpreter, gave me a push and said go. I went, and on my bended knees received the benediction and protection. As I returned to my place, my guide said, "Now you are a Siccannee," and he went forward.

When it was all over and we stepped out into the darkness and the quiet, my head was reeling. I went to my bed as quickly as I could; but I slept none that night, for I had been a companion to the wildest men in the wildest country in their wildest mood, and wondered whether it was all of earth, or partly infernal!

I saw much of that Siccannee band during the next six weeks; for they visited us at Lake Tatla, and I never received anything from them but kindness. I had sympathized with them in their sorrow, eaten of their food and been protected

Bulkley House

as one of their number. To this day I love them, for their hardiness, hospitali and primitive virtues, all of which I hope the advancing civilization has spared them:- if the little band still exists! . . .

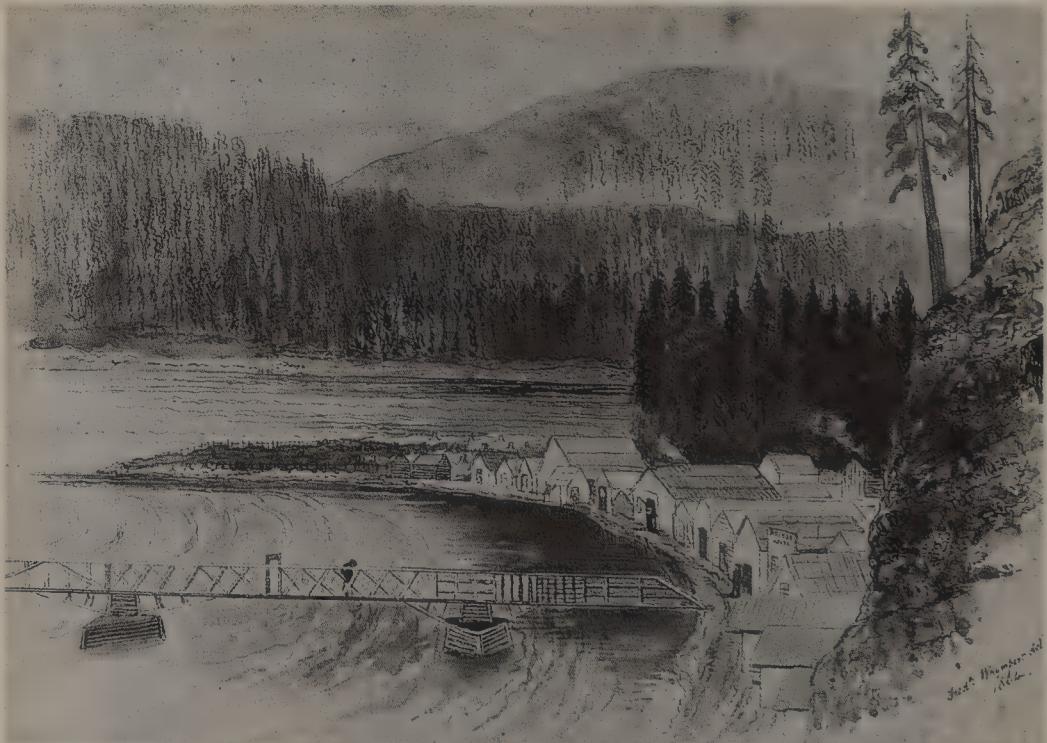


GOSNELL B.C. YEAR BOOK 1897

*SIC



Bulkley House, Takla Lake, in 1866. Sketch based on a watercolor by Franklin L. Pope. As described in Doctor Rothrock's writing.
Courtesy B.C. Provincial Archives.



Quesnel Forks - from a painting by Frederick Whymper, 1864.
Courtesy B.C. Provincial Archives.

1865

ADVISES INDEPENDENCE OF H.B.Co

Ed Conway

The construction of the overland line through the colony of British Columbia proceeded with great rapidity, considering the mountainous and difficult nature of the country. This division was under the immediate charge of Assistant Engineer Ed. Conway, previously of the United States Military Telegraph.

From the *Journal and Letters of Col. C.S. Bulkley, U.S. Army Telegraph Trail Expedition 1865-1867*, once again, we take this report of Mr. Conway's.

The contents of this handwritten(now fading) journal represents opinions, facts and data from the past, especially in relation to the Central Interior of British Columbia. Progress, routes, conditions, personnel, setbacks, and in this case, suggestion for company policy, are dealt with in the reports and correspondence.

Mr. Conway was reporting here to Colonel Chas S. Bulkley, from New Westminster, B.C., December 30, 1865.

I have obtained a few particulars in relation to the Hudson Bay Co, which I beg leave to lay before you, hoping that it may prove of service to you

From *Journal and Letters of Col. C.S. Bulkley, U.S. Army Telegraph Trail Expedition, 1865-1867*. Bound, photocopied volume, Northwest Room, Vancouver Public Library, Vancouver, British Columbia. Permission to use from Library Association of Portland, Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. where original is kept.

Independence

and the company, which you represent. They employ their men in England, Scotland and Canada, and bind them formally for a certain number of years at a salary, varying from \$75- to \$150- per year. They send them out on their own ships from England and Scotland, those from Canada overland. As they are immediately sent to the interior, it is impossible for them to leave until their time expires; they cannot procure food, should they wish to escape, nor will the Indians aid them. After the first term they are allowed to marry, or take a squaw, this invariably induces them to remain permanently, and gives the company a friend among the Indians. This woman has proved valuable, in case of hostilities with the natives. The company supports the family of employees, giving them rations of dried salmon.

Should employees impose upon the natives or seduce their women, they are fined a certain number of blankets or other articles which are charged to the oppressor, and given to the injured.

The men around the Fort seldom get anything to eat except what they can procure with their guns. A clerk, in charge of the Fort, is only allowed 100 lbs of flour and a small supply of sugar and tea yearly. The great secret of their getting along with the Indians is simply, that the Indians cannot get along without them. They cannot live without powder and shot, and they would not like to be deprived of their tobacco, and other luxuries, to which they have become accustomed.

The H.B. Co are very particular, and exact in all of their dealings with the Indians; they then gain their good will. Should an Indian murder any of their men, he is hunted down, until captured, and then hung in the presence of his tribe; this is done regardless of cost, and is sure to be the result, should it take fifty years to accomplish it, the Indians are aware of this fact. A few of the best Indians of each tribe are generally retained around the Fort, for hunting, getting wood and general work. The company purchases large quantities of salmon, which they lay up for winter use. In trading, everything is counted by skins, I enclose a bit of their prices. The company purchased at Babine fishery last fall(1865) over 20,000 dried salmon. This lot of salmon cost them \$1000 in trade. The district of Caledonia purchased 5000 Martin skins last year. In 1829 this small district of six stations made \$65,000 clear profit. I think that the Western Union Co will find it necessary to trade with the Indians. By doing so it will be much easier to keep on good terms with them. If the company does not trade, it will be almost impossible to prevent the employees from doing so. We do not need the cooperation of the H.B.Co any longer, and it is better to be independent of them. We will be more respected by the Indians and better off in

Independence

many respects; the government will give us more encouragement and assistance, than they will to the H.B. Co, which they do not like. We know now the country better than H.B. Co, having been over all that they have seen and a great portion of that they know nothing whatever about. They have no right whatever for trading in New Caledonia, as their charter for this place has expired. They have charged us most exorbitant prices for all that we received, as you will perceive by the vouchers. We can secure a number of their employees, whose time expires early next season.

I will conclude by assuring you that I am on the very best of terms with all the employees and officers of the H.B. Co, and shall continue to be so. I merely express my opinion to you.

Hoping that my information may be of some service

I am yours, very respectfully

Your obedient servant

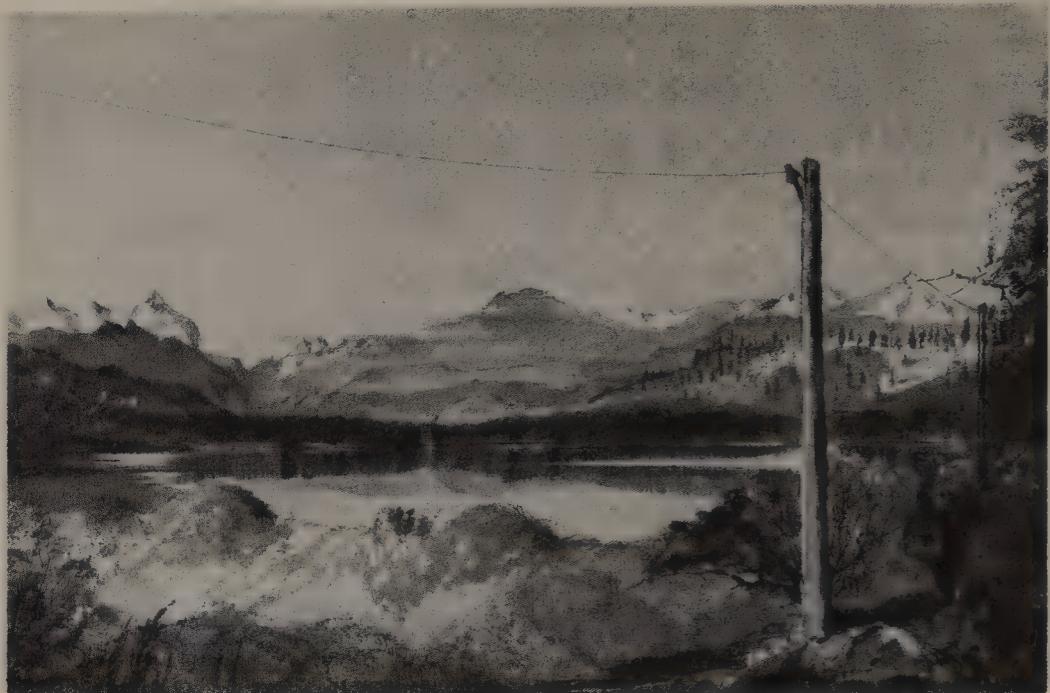
(signed) Ed Conway

Asst. Engineer

Hudson bay co's indian tariff

Lake Talta. November 3d 1865

Made Beaver(each)	\$ 1.00
Capot (common cloth) 4 Ells	10.00
do. do. 3 1/2	9.00
Knives (best)	
Shirts (blue serge)	3.00
Shot (____)	1.00
Ball (___24___)	1.00
Belts(Scarlet)	3.00
Handkerchiefs (common calico)	-.50



J.C. White, artist with Collins Overland Telegraph Expedition, 1865-67,
gave us a glimpse of the landscape traversed by the telegraph line.
Courtesy B.C. Provincial Archives.



A pack train travels along the telegraph trail during construction of the
line. J.C. White, artist, 1865.
Courtesy B.C. Provincial Archives.

1866

A SEASON'S WORK

Ed Conway

Since the Telegraph Trail passed a considerable distance south west of Fort George, it opened a new trail from Quesnel northwest to Stoney Creek and Fort Fraser, and consequently diverted much of the traffic away from the Fraser and Nechako rivers. So at this time Fort George was off the main line of land travel into northern British Columbia. By 1867, Quesnel had become more than a junction to Barkerville. It was an important centre of trade, even superseding Fort St. James as the emporium of the north. Her prospectors and traders secured their supplies whether they travelled by land or water.

It is of interest today to note that the project of this telegraph line directed the attention of America to the Russian owned territory on this continent, which was immensely rich in fur-bearing seals, and the reports of Colonel Bulkley forwarded to the Secretary of State in Washington were probably a determining factor in the purchase of Alaska by the United States from the Czar's government in 1867 for \$7,200,000.

On October 2nd, 1866, operations were suspended for the winter and never resumed. In July of that year the Atlantic cable had been successfully re-laid and Western Union realized the futility of continuing its project. Official decision to halt work was not taken until March, 1867. After an expenditure of three million dollars, the order to halt was given. It took four months to get the news to the Siberian parties and bring in the men and equipment. Actual construction in British Columbia was carried across the junction of the Skeena and Kispiox rivers. Near the present village of Kispiox the company built their last station, naming it Fort Stager. The plan to run north of Fort St. James had been abandoned. Telegraph Creek, on the

Season

Stikine River, ~~was~~ reached in exploration in the winter of 1866-67 and named because the wire ~~was~~ projected to cross the river at that point, but construction halted many miles to the south.

The Indians of the area, who had regarded the "talking wire" with great misgivings, began to make ~~use~~ of the salvage. They used the green glass insulators for drinking cups and ornaments, and with remarkable engineering skill built a suspension bridge across Hagwilget Canyon on the Bulkley River. It proved serviceable and was used for many years.

Two artists ~~were~~ associated with this project who have left touching illustrations of the conditions that existed throughout this gigantic enterprise; they ~~are~~ J.C. White and Frederick Whymper. The latter became a famous mountain climber. Frederick Whymper later also wrote a book, *Travels in Alaska & on the Yukon*. In it many of the more exciting aspects of northerly experiences and dreams were dealt with.

In 1932, on August 22, a cairn was erected in Quesnel, by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to "Mark the first unit in the telegraph system of the West - the Western Union venture of 1865-6 known as the Collins Overland Telegraph," with Judge F.W. Howay, western representative of the Historic Sites Commission, delivering the address of the day.

An article in the Vancouver Daily Province covered this event, saying, in part: "Judge F.W. Howay, in his inimitable style, traced the history of the Collins Overland from its inception in the mind of Perry McDonough Collins, American commercial agent in Russia, down to the time the working portion of the line was taken over by the Dominion Government. This ~~was~~ in 1901 when the Yukon wire was completed . . .

"The Collins system, following the successful laying of Cyrus Field's cable in 1866, ~~was~~ abandoned north of Quesnel. A few years later Barkerville was connected, but the British Columbia section, from New Westminster to Barkerville, while performing useful service was a losing proposition and lay on the bargain counter for years awaiting a purchaser."

Other speakers were John A. Fraser, M.P; William Adams of Lillooet, W.J. Moffat of Kamloops, A.M. Patterson of Prince George and George E. Johnston of Quesnel.

Among those present was Mrs. R.W. Renwick of Prince George, daughter of the late R.B. McMicking, telegraph operator at Quesnel when the Collins Overland reached there in September, 1865.

Season

From Bulkley's Journal, once again, this final yearly report of Ed Conway explains the past season's progress of the army Telegraph Trail Expedition commonly referred to as the Collins Overland Telegraph:

I beg leave to lay before you a brief report of the seasons work for 1866. In the fall of 1865 the only route known for operations, north of Fort Fraser, being by Fort St. James and Lake Tatla. I had six men employed at Quesnel during the winter, constructing large bateaux for the transportation of supplies and material from Quesnel. There were five strong clinker built boats constructed, each to carry four tons. Fearing that I would not be able to hire men for the boating parties at Quesnel, I determined to engage Stikine and other Indians from the coast, at New Westminster, and take them up the wagon road. This afterwards proved a very fortunate move. I arrived at Quesnel on the 1st of May, and succeeded, after great difficulty, in getting together 25 white men, with whom, and sixty animals, I commenced work on the 14th of May, eighteen miles north of Quesnel. Owing to the excitement created about the Big Bend gold mines, I found it almost impossible to hire men at Quesnel, which I did by allowing them ten days pay. On the 17th of May my force was increased by the arrival of 25 chinamen. By the 1st of June I had 150 men, 86 in construction camp, 26 packers with 160 animals, 38 whitemen and Indians transporting supplies in bateaux, between Quesnel and Fort Fraser. The Fraser River being very high, and the current consequently very swift, the boats had great difficulty in getting up to Fort Fraser and only succeeded in making two trips, when I was compelled to have the rest of our supplies brought up by the trail. We constructed the telegraph road, and line to Latitude 55.42 W. and Longitude 128.15 W. The distance from Quesnel by the road, is computed at 440 miles, and by the river 378 miles. There are 15 stations built, a log house, with chimney, door and windows, 25 miles apart. We built bridges over all small streams, that were not fordable, corduroyed swamps. All hillsides, too steep for animals to travel over, were graded, from 3 to five feet wide. The average width of clearing the wood for the wire, is, in standing timber, 20 feet; and in fallen timber, 12 feet. All underbrush and small timber is cleared to the ground thus leaving the road

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Season

fit for horses, travelling at a rate of, from 30 to 50 miles per day. Double wires were stretched across all large rivers. Number of poles put up is 9246. Boats are built for crossing the Bulkley and West Road River. The coast party 23 men, under command of Jas. L. Butler, left Victoria on Steamer "Mumsford" on July 5th; they succeeded in landing at Fort Stager(Skeena River) 150 miles of material and 12000 rations. They also transported to Shakesville on the Stikine River 4500 rations, and left at the mouth of Stikine over 200 miles of material, and near 20,000 rations. Owing to the uncertainty of our route, and the fast approaching winter, we were compelled to suspend work on the 2nd October. The party returned to the Skeena River, from the point they had reached beyond it, and came down to Fort Simpson in five flat bottomed boats constructed at Fort Stager. On the 18th of October the party left Fort Simpson on Steamer "Otter" and "Mumford" for New Westminster, where they were paid off during the latter part of October. The accompanying journal gives the amount of work done each day, and the force employed. I also forward the map of our route, which will describe the country in detail much better than I can possibly do it in a report. In concluding this brief report I can assure you, that we constructed in every respect, a first class line, omitting nothing, that would help in making it a good working, and durable line. It runs through an extremely favorable country, and is constructed in such a manner, that it can be kept in repair with but little difficulty, and at not a very great expense. I cannot speak too highly of the officers and men employed in the American Division during the past season, they overcame all obstacles cheerfully and willingly. Mr. Butler commanding the coast party, deserves great credit for the energy displayed by him in transporting supplies up the Skeena and Stikeen Rivers. The Division quarter Master, Mr. Burrage, gave great satisfaction, and kept the party well supplied with provisions and material. The foremen, Mr. Decker and Bradley displayed great energy, and left behind them first class work.



A J.C. White watercolor shows a Collins Overland Telegraph campsite.
Courtesy B.C. Provincial Archives



Another sketch by J.C. Pope shows the terminal station of Collins
Overland Telegraph, New Westminster.
Courtesy B.C. Provincial Archives

1870

GISCOME PORTAGE

H. M. Ball

About 34 miles upstream on the Fraser River from Prince George there is a point at which a nine or ten mile portage can be made across to Summit Lake. This portage takes the traveller from the Pacific watershed to the Arctic watershed or vice versa depending on which direction he favours. It is called Giscome Portage. This "key" to travel in Central British Columbia prior to modern methods, was quite phenomenal as a communication link, which will become more apparent as this book progresses and various parties report on passing through. Besides allowing access to the Peace River country, this route also offered passage to the Omineca goldfields which were fast gaining in popularity with the miners as the Cariboo gold became more illusive. Once Summit Lake was achieved on this trail north, the traveller was on the Parsnip River descent to the Peace River, hence the Mackenzie and the Arctic Ocean. To get to the mining area on this route to the Omineca it was necessary to ascend the Finlay River and then its tributary, the Omineca.

As early as 1861 gold was discovered on the Parsnip River by Ed Carey and Bill Cust. After wintering at Quesnel mouth they repeated their journey in 1862, accompanied by Peter Toy, Joseph Oates, and Ezra Evans, and each obtained \$1,200 from fifty days' washing. Ten miles below the mouth of the Omineca River Pete Toy struck a bar rich in gold. There he stopped and built a cabin, claiming the bar as his own property. When his gold bar played out he became a free-trader and trapper, but his cabin on the south bank of the Finlay River was a landmark for many years. Bill Cust, with the opening of the Omineca gold fields, in 1870, moved a store he had

Giscome

been operating at Fort George to a place at the western end of the Peace River Canyon, which became known as Cust House.

While working for the telegraph line, some of the men had heard of the isolated mines back of Stuart Lake, which were as yet undeveloped, and, upon the breaking up of the party, they turned their attention to the search after the precious metal. Among them was a French Canadian named Vital Laforce, who soon struck rich pay on a creek which is now called after him.

As Father A.G. Morice puts it in his *History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia*, "The success of the new miners could not long be kept secret. Indeed, the very mystery with which some of them tried to surround their operations added zest to the ardour with which the Cariboo miners and others endeavored to investigate for themselves. In a short time, the Stuart and Skeena Rivers were dotted with boats and canoes full of prospectors. Henceforth, in the Fort St. James' Journal, which at that time is extremely dull and laconic, we hear of nothing but the arrival or departure of such gentlemen as Dancing Bill, Black Jack, Dutch Harry, Red Alick and French Franck."

Pete Dunlevy, the discoverer of Horsefly Mines, had established a store at Beaver Lake near Soda Creek in 1861. In 1870 he dispatched a boat loaded with sundry articles for the Indian trade up the Fraser, Nechako and Stuart Rivers. To further his trade with the natives, he established a number of outposts, one of which was at Giscome Portage. Some reports show this portage to have been named after a negro cook of Dunlevy's. *1001 British Columbia Place Names*, by G.P.V & Helen B. Akrigg, 3rd Edition says it was named after John Robert Giscome, a negro miner who entered the district in the 1860's, and died in Victoria about 1910.

Twelve-foot Davis, another famous character became a partner with Dunlevy in charge of the Peace River trade. On his annual trips to the south he was a regular caller at Fort George, and was the first man to use Summit Lake and the Crooked River for commercial freighting.

The need for a road across Giscome Portage to service the new findings in the Omineca prompted the following appeal to the Hon. Colonial Secretary by H.M. Ball, Stip. Magistrate, Richfield[Barkerville]. It was written December 28, 1870.

Letter from H.M.Ball, Stipendiary Magistrate, Richfield, to the Colonial Secretary, Victoria, 28 December 1870. Provincial Archives of British Columbia, Colonial Correspondence, H.M. Ball Correspondence.

28 DECEMBER, 1870

I have the honor to forward a map of the Peace River Country, which has been presented to me by Mr. G.B. Wright, who compiled it partly from the information he received from the miners who had explored that section of the country, and partly from his own explorations.

By this map it will be seen that a divide of about 10 miles in length separates the waters of the Fraser River from the head waters of the Peace River, and if a road were made across the portage, the transport of provisions to the locality of the new mines could be made by water, with the exception of this 10 miles land carriage.

Mr. Wright who travelled over this portage, reports it to be at an elevation of not more than one hundred and fifty or two hundred feet, and an open country through which a road could be easily and cheaply made -

He proposes taking up one of his steamers above the Cottonwood Canon in the spring, and opening this portage, but of course looks for some assistance from the Government and from the reports I hear of the easy navigation of the waters on the other side, this route would be the most desirable one to open -

Then mines on Germansen Creek will attract the attention of several hundred men, as all of those who worked there in the Autumn pronounce the Creek as far as it was prospected to be a good paying creek and easily worked

A cattle Trail from Ft McLeod to the creek should be made, which would afford an outlet for those miners who might remain until after the ice was in the rivers.

1871

REMOTE GOVERNING

Peter O' Reilly

Following the initial gold findings on the Peace River, there are scattered reports of people who "worked" there and on its tributaries in the Omineca.

In January 1863, Bell, Goldsmith, and three others left Victoria for Peace River and obtained half an ounce a day to the man on almost every bar down to the junction of Finlay River. No excitement appears to have resulted from these discoveries, owing chiefly, no doubt, to the developments in the Cariboo country, which overshadowed everything else for the time.

From the works of Hubert Howe Bancroft and information he gleaned from the *Victoria Weekly Colonist*, Feb. 23, 1870, we read: "Influenced by discoveries on the main or southern branch of Peace River, a party of Cariboo miners reached Fort St James in 1864, and taking a different route, followed the canoes of the Hudson's Bay Company north, through Stewart[Stuart] and Tatla[Takla] Lakes, to a point opposite the head-waters of the Omineca tributary; thence striking over the Peak or Blue Mountains, they entered the Peace River basin and mined till the following year, returning home with four or five thousand dollars. One of the men, Michael Foy, remained behind and mined successfully for five years, remitting several thousand dollars to his daughter.

"Meanwhile fur-traders continued to report rich diggings in this region, and Davis and Johns, who in 1866 and 1867 traded through the country for furs on their own account, brought with them to Victoria a considerable quantity of gold-dust which they had obtained."

Remote

From F.W. Howay and E.O.S. Scholefield, who compiled *British Columbia History from the Earliest Times to the Present*, we turn for another part of the story: "Arctic Creek had been found in 1868 by Humphreys, Gaylord, Evans, and Twelve Foot Davis.

"Michael Burns and Vital La Force had wintered on the head-waters of Omineca River in 1868-9. Returning to Quesnel, these persons brought the news of the wealth of this far-away region. Government and private individuals combined to raise a fund to prospect the new and promising territory. Burns was selected as leader, with Humphreys and La Force as lieutenants. The expedition set out early in May, 1869. The Unknown North closed round them. Nothing was heard until the fall, when vague rumors of an important discovery circulated; but when the party themselves returned they brought unfavourable reports. Suspicions arose that these reports were untrue. When the members of the party set out again from Quesnel for that land of mystery, they were followed and overtaken. Finding all attempts to evade their unwelcome companions unavailing, a compromise was made by which the traitorous prospectors agreed to lead the way to the new creek, where they had taken out \$8,000 in thirty-five days, on condition that they be allowed to stake off their own claims first. Burns now headed for the south side of Omineca Mountains and brought the party to a creek known as Vital Creek, a tributary of the Omineca. Fully one tenth of the metal found on this creek was native silver and Burns claimed that his motive for secrecy was to discover the ledge from whence it came before the rush set in. The news of the truth brought the "rush." On this occasion the excitement was far greater than usual. Though it was late in the season, miners flocked in from Cariboo and all other parts of British Columbia.

"Vital Creek was disappointing. A strange coincidence was noticed on this creek, where the native silver was found, there, too was gold, and when the silver ceased, so, too, did the gold. Water, slum, and cold weather caused the abandonment of shaft after shaft without any returns being obtained. The search was continued. Silver Creek and Burns Creek, both heading out of the same mountain, gave small returns; yet here, as in the Big Bend, an unreasoning and baseless faith in the productiveness of the country gained ground. Late in the season of 1870 a party of fifteen Chinese took out \$7,000 in three weeks. This gave a small basis of reality to hope.

"Many creeks obtained a temporary prominence - BlackJack Gulch, Arctic, Slate, Skeleton, Quartz, Lost, Manson, and Germansen. Only the last two, however, were at all permanent. As in Kootenay, Wild Horse over-

Remote

shadowed all others; as in Cariboo, Williams Creek held the same position, here, in a smaller way, Germansen was easily the most important. It was named after James Germansen, a native of St. Paul, Minnesota, who discovered it in July, 1870. During the last week of August, 1871, \$10,000 was taken from its benches. Mr. Peter O'Reilly, who was the first Gold Commissioner in Omineca, reported, in October, 1871, that the yield for that season was \$400,000"

As those "rushing" to goldfields became aware of the promise offered on the Omineca River, north of Fort St. James, local governing bodies became necessary. In 1871, Peter O'Reilly, as Gold Commissioner(resident) filled this position. In the summer of 1871 a gold rush was in full swing. The Hon. Peter O'Reilly, Chief Gold Commissioner, stipendiary magistrate, and a prominent resident of Victoria was given the additional appointment of County Court Judge for Northern Mines, and instructed to spend the summer in the area and represent the Government of British Columbia. He served at Fort Langley, Cariboo, Big Bend country(Columbia) and East Kootenay before going to the Omineca in 1871.

It should be noted here that confederation, in 1871, brought Federal institutions into the territory, agents of which ignored New Caledonia's historic boundaries, and set up administrative areas within the territory. After 1871 the Fort St. James' Hudson's Bay Post lost much of its jurisdiction to the H.B.C.'s British Columbia Regional Office now established in Victoria.

The following extract has been taken from O'Reilly's reports to the Colonial Secretary in Victoria, and reveal on-the-spot experiences.

1st July, 1871

I have the honor to state for the information of His Excellency the Governor that since the date of my last report(6th June) no change has taken place in the mines in consequence of the high stage of the water which precludes the possibility of work of any kind being carried on in the Creek, nor is it likely that mining operations can be commenced before the 15th or 20th of this month.

There are now congregated here about Eight Hundred men and others continue to arrive daily, over two hundred have been compelled to leave, being unprovided with provisions, and not being able to procure any, it is as a favor

Letter from Peter O'Reilly to the Colonial Secretary, 1 July 1871. British Columbia, Department of Mines, Gold Commissioner, Omineca, Letter Book, 1871-72.

Remote

that anything of this sort and then only in small quantities at famine prices - I am informed that a large supply of provisions has arrived at Tatlah Landing from Quesnelle, but the traders are deterred from sending them into the market, partly by the high prices demanded for freight and also from the fact that no money has yet been realized from the mines, and were they to do so now, they would be compelled to dispose of their goods on credit; not a pound of freight has yet been received by way of Skeena.

Several parties have been formed for the purpose of prospecting the surrounding country, and I am not without hope of being able to report fresh discoveries before long.

I have considered it necessary to improve the trail from the Mouth of Germansen Creek to the Town of Omineca a distance of three miles, and availed myself of the services of Mr. Dewdney to have the line blazed; the timber and logs have been chopped out at a cost of "Two Hundred and Twenty Dollars" since which the rate of packing has been reduced from 5 to 2 1/2 cts per pound.

The Town of Omineca of which I made mention in my last report has also been surveyed and divided into sixty two Lots most of which are now occupied and a double row of substantial houses in course of construction. Repeated applications have been made to me by the inhabitants of the Town for Government Assistance to grub and grade the street, the ground rent has been collected from each householder which amounts to over ninety dollars for the Month of June, and I would suggest that authority be given to me to expend the sum of about "One Hundred Dollars" for the purpose asked.

I regret to report that several robberies of flour bacon &c have taken place but owing to the difficulty of identifying the guilty parties, no arrests have been made, the sufferers have been invariably Chinese. I have found it necessary to engage the services of a special Constable and have employed Mr Frances Page for one Month at the rate of two Hundred dollars, which I trust will meet with the approval of His Excellency but I am of opinion, as the district is enlarged, the services of an officer in this capacity will be necessary during the remainder of the season.

In my last letter I alluded to the necessity of either building or renting an Office at Omineca, at present I consider it would be premature to incur the expense of building and have therefore engaged a small office at a monthly rent of Thirty Dollars.

A great deal of dissatisfaction is expressed by the miners at there being no mail communication in the district and also at the high rates charged for letters sent by Express. At present the only reliable mode of transmitting letters

Remote

to or from the mines is by Mr Sylvester's Express via Quesnell. I am unable in the absence of Mr Sylvester to submit any definite proposition from him but I am led to believe that he would undertake the service on reasonable terms in connection with his Express - As the season is so far advanced, and with a view to save time I would suggest that I be empowered to enter into an arrangement with him, or others for the carriage of a monthly or fortnightly mail between Quesnelle and Germansen Creek provided the sum does not exceed one Hundred & Fifty dollars per month.

I have deferred going to Stuarts Lake, Skeena, and other portions of the district until the press of business is over in the mines and also as I shall have to hold a Court of Revision under the "Registration of Voters Act" during the month of August, when I shall visit these places and at the same time mark off the Indian Reserves when necessary.

The Weather has been unusually cold and stormy during the past month with not infrequent frosts at night which has much retarded vegetation.

I enclose herewith the usual monthly return of Revenue collected in the Omineca District.

1872

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Wm H. Fitzgerald

W.H. Fitzgerald followed Peter O'Reilly as Stipendiary Magistrate at the Omineca in 1872. His letter of May 20, to the Hon. G.A. Wakem, Chief Commissioner of L & Works; of June 17, to Hon. A. Rock Robertson, Provincial Secretary; October 21, Mr. Robertson again and then a second one to Mr. Wakem gives some indication of the variety of work load that fell to these men. Extra expenses of any kind, and particularly expense accounts were discouraged as indicated in the closing paragraphs of the letters reproduced here. These letters were recorded in the *Germansen Creek Letter Book 1871-1875*, the original of which is located at the Provincial Archives in Victoria.

Responsibility to road building, and 1872 improvements are discussed in two of these letters, and Mr. Fitzgerald very conscientiously shoulders the load.

Father A.G. Morice, in *The History of the Northern Interior of British Columbia*, published in 1906, briefly describes the role these men played, as he saw it: "A saloon, that unavoidable token of that which some call civilization, had been erected, wherein the fort[Fort St. James] chronicle says that grand entertainments--and something else--were given. To offset the usual effects of the kind of goods plentifully supplied in said institution, two gentlemen, Peter O'Reilly and W.H. Fitzgerald, were acting as the representatives of the Colonial Government. In a new country, among aborigines whose language they did not understand and whites who only too often imagined that they were above every law because they had crossed the limits of civilization, their path was full of thorns, and mistakes were to be expected, especially in cases where Indians were concerned."

Northern

From F.W. Howay and E.O.S. Scholefield, and *British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present* the demise of the great rush to the Omineca is described thusly:

"The summer of 1872 saw fewer miners in Omineca. Germansen and Manson creeks were the only ones on which any mining was carried on; from the whole territory from which so much had been expected, already the glory had departed. In 1874 some sixty claims were being worked by eighty miners. The return for that year was only \$80,000. In the following year the estimated gold production had decreased to \$32,000, and the total number of miners to sixty-eight. In 1876 the mining report simply says of this district that it is almost deserted.

"As the gold production in Omineca decreased, the miners applied to the Government for assistance in exploring for new creeks. Mr. A.W. Vowell, who had succeeded Mr. O'Reilly as Gold Commissioner, obtained permission in 1873 to grant aid to the extent of \$1,250; and an effort was made to find new diggings on Mckenzie Creek in the Bear Lake region, to the northwestward. Nothing of value was discovered. It will not have been overlooked by the reader that, until the discovery of the Omineca, all the mining in British Columbia had been upon streams whose waters made their way to the Pacific. Now the miners had crossed the divide to the northeastern watershed of the great gold range which traverses the province from northwest to southeast between the Coast Range and the Rocky Mountains. The streams of the Omineca region find their way by the Finlay and Peace Rivers into the Mackenzie and thence into the Frozen Ocean.

"Just as the best days of Omineca were passing came cheering news of gold discoveries even farther to the northwest, at the very northern fringe of British Columbia. A new yellow star on the horizon. The miner ever had his dream of El Dorado--fresh and sanguine. The bleak North, where lay the latest find, ensured the proper setting--the distance lent enchantment. The inaccessibility--the virgin wilderness--the sterile, barren soil--the frigid climate--all the forces that deter men in ordinary avocations act rever-sely on the miner. Such country, he illogically argues, must be rich in gold; it is good for naught else."

Determining the position of the road and working on this route north of Fort St. James, was an act that would, however, have a lasting influence on this vast wilderness.

Northern

These early letters from the Omineca, written by Stipendiary Magistrate Wm H. Fitzgerald, deal directly with the historical evolution of that particular development.

May 20th 1872

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 17th ultimo authorizing the Expenditure of Five Thousand Eight Hundred Dollars on the trail from Quesnelle to Manson River.

It is to be regretted that the work was not commenced earlier, ■ I think it would have been more economical, if a working party had been started from Quesnelle, where I have no doubt that good men could have been easily obtained at reasonable wages, especially as the work was en route to the mines. In this manner I ■■ of the opinion the heaviest work might have been done, and later in the season, the foreman with a few hands could have finished the grading &c.

In the meantime I shall endeavour to engage a few men, and commence operations at Fort St James, working towards Manson Creek, but Miners ask such exorbitant wages, that I am afraid the work cannot be carried on as quickly as I would desire.

I shall use every exertion to carry out your views in regard to the repairs on the trail, and will supervise the work as closely as I can consistently with my other duties.

In regard to the trails from Skeena-Forks to the Mines, the route via Frying pan pass is ■■ excellent winter road to the Omineca River, and should any mines be discovered in the vicinity of Finlay River, I think it would be the most practicable line, as the Omineca is navigable for boats from the terminus of the trail to the Mouth of the river, a distance of one hundred and twenty miles, but at present, the mines are veering towards parsnip river, which makes the road circuitous and increases the expenses on the shipment of goods.

However I would suggest that a portion of the money voted should be expended in cutting out the Frying Pan Pass, as miners will always use this road in the Autumn and Early Spring, and as it is not blazed, travelling is exceedingly dangerous.

Letters: W.H. Fitzgerald to G.A. Walkem, Chief and Commissioner of Lands and Works, 20 May 1872; to A. Rocke Robertson, Provincial Secretary, 17 June 1872 and 21 October 1872 (British Columbia, Department of Mines, Gold Commissioner, *Omineca letter-book*, 1871-1872. G.R. 233, vol. 1).

Northern

Of the route via Lake Babine the only data I have to give you are those furnished by Mr Sylvester, who travelled over the proposed line in the month of March - and estimates the distance from Manson Creek to Rivier du Merclu, at Sixty five miles, he is confident that a good trail can be cut without great expense, but I think it would be premature to expend any money, until the Snow is off the ground and a practical man sent over the trail

I submit this suggestion for your consideration, and should it meet your views you might send a telegram to that effect and I would lose no time in having the line properly blazed by a competent person. This road would strike Lake Tatlah near its outlet, and almost opposite to a trail that leads to the Hudson Bay Coy Fort on Lake Babine (the distance between the two lakes at this point is Thirty miles) thence following the eastern shore of the Lake to Babine river (a distance of twenty five miles) where it would intersect the trail from Skeena and the communication by land from Skeena Forks to the mines would be perfect.

Another line has been opened by Mr G.B. Wright, by which passengers and goods are carried up Lake Babine, in boats, to a point called Bia du Boigne thence across an excellent trail (distance about twenty four miles) to Lake Trembleur where the steamer "Enterprise" connects and runs to the proposed terminus on Lake Tatlah. This line would probably be used this summer as the amount voted is not sufficient to open the other.

June 17th 1872

I have the honor to state for the information of His Excellency the Lieutenant Governor that a sad accident occurred on the 10th instant, at Manson River, in this District, which terminated in the death of three men named respectively David Humphrey A.E.B. Mann and William Cook.

It would appear that a party of nine miners, went out into the mountains to gather Mushrooms, but being unacquainted with the different descriptions of "Fungi" unfortunately gathered a poisonous species, and on their return to their homes, they cooked and ate the fungus, on the following day all the men were taken seriously ill, and three cases out of the nine proved fatal.

I held an inquest on the bodies and enclose herewith copies of the verdicts given by the Jury, also copies of the depositions taken before me at the same time.

October 21 1872

I have the honor to report for the information, of his Excellency the Lieutenant Governor, that mining operations in the beds of the different creeks in this District have been stopped for the season, in consequence of a heavy freshet, which occurred on Sept 30th and filled up the works of the miners engaged.

On Germansen Creek about one hundred men have been working successfully, and I think the same number will find profitable employment next year; the mines on this Creek are located principally on "Benches" and as a general thing, have paid the owners handsomely.

Slate Creek has also given employment to one hundred men, and in some instances the claims have paid very well, but the diggings on this stream have been so spotted, that the majority of the claim-holders have been disappointed in their expectations.

On Manson River, where the largest body of miners was congregated, the bench claims have paid much better than those located on the Creek, the deep ground on this creek, about which, miners were so sanguine last season, has not proved to be rich: some good claims however have been found on the high rock adjoining the Channel.

I have endeavoured to ascertain as nearly as possible the amount of gold dust taken out of the claims in this District during the summer, and the returns furnished to me shew a yield of three hundred thousand Dollars.

A report was brought in by Indians that the remains of the body of a man had been seen in the vicinity of the Trail through the Frying Pan Pass; on my circuit to Babine &c I visited the place indicated and caused a search to be made; which resulted in the following portions of a man being found viz. the beard and hair, some bones that had been gnawed by wild animals and remnants of clothing; which convinced me that a man had died there either from exposure or had met with foul play.

Since my visit one of the men employed on the trail found a tin cup in the same vicinity with the name of Daniel Campbell scratched on it, which was probably the name of the deceased. Although police enquiries have been made no information has been received so far that would lead to identification.

Northern

December 23rd 1872

I have the honor to forward herewith ■ statement of the total Expenditure incurred in the repairs on the Quesnelle-Manson River Trail, which amounts to four thousand three hundred and nine 65/100 dollars and for which I enclose forty four vouchers.

The road has been cleared of all fallen timber and debris from Manson River to Stuarts River Ferry and from that point to Quesnelle the worst portions have been cut out and straightened, which has shortened the distance considerably.

I consider that a further Expenditure of three thousand dollars will be required to complete the opening of this route, which includes the construction of Bridges at Blackwater, Mud River, and several minor streams between the latter point and Manson River.

The Agent of the Hudson's Bay Coy informs me that a large number of tools belonging to the Department are on storage at Fort George at the rate of five dollars per month; these tools were left by Mr. Grant after the completion of the road across the Giscome Portage.

I think it would be advisable to have them brought to Stuarts Lake, for the use of any public work that may be done in the District, or if you desire I ■■■ have them forwarded by the Hudson's Bay Coy's boat, in the Spring to Quesnelle where they might be utilized by the Department.

With reference to the amount disallowed by the Auditor, in my travelling expenses, while superintending the opening of the Frying Pan Pass Trail, you will perceive that I have refunded the sum viz. eighteen dollars ■■■ credit in the accompanying statement.

The horse which was purchased for packing purposes on the work has been sent to pasture for the winter as I could not sell him at the close of the season.

1872

AT THE CROSSROADS

Rev. George Grant

More than a "pass", the Yellowhead was a portal for travels north or south in British Columbia; a crossroads.

When Rev. George Grant wrote *Ocean to Ocean* following his trip out west with Sandford Fleming in 1872, his book was one of the first to assess some of the countrysides that offered a route for the Canadian Pacific Railway.

British Columbia entered confederation in 1871, on the condition that a transcontinental railway be constructed within a decade. The Dominion undertook the challenge, dispatched surveying parties immediately, and appointed Sandford Fleming to direct the project.

From the Introduction to *Ocean to Ocean*, by William Lawson Grant, son, in collaboration with Charles Frederick Hamilton, a friend and pupil we learn: "To the last, Grant held that a great mistake had been made by the later engineers of the C.P.R., when they abandoned the route surveyed under Fleming's guidance through the Yellow Head Pass and took the more southerly route through the Kicking Horse Pass, with its steeper grades. No satisfactory reason for the change has ever been given. Was it due to a lingering faint-heartedness which felt that the northern route would be lost amidst eternal snows; did political considerations enter in and Conservatives feel that the Liberal route must be abandoned; it is one of the unsolved problems of Canadian history. The choice of the Yellow Head Pass by the two later lines, the Canadian Northern and the Canadian National, have justified the unfailing belief of Grant and of Fleming."

Crossroads

This excerpt from Grant's book enlarges on the significance of the Yellow Head Pass as a crossroad and offers a rare description at this time when we are entering the "survey" period.

September 18th

. . . A mile beyond, we came to the Grand Fork of the Fraser, where the main stream receives from the northeast a tributary important enough to be often considered its source. It flows in three great divisions, through a meadow two miles wide, from round the bases of Robson's Peak--the monarch of the mountains hereabouts--and his only less mighty satellites whose pyramidal forms cluster in his rear. A mile from the first division, we came to the second, and found the first section of Mohun's[Macoun's] pack-train in the act of crossing it towards us. The first section consisted of horses; the second of mules led by a bell horse, under the supervision of Leitch, the chief packer, followed a mile behind. A general halt was called and Leitch sent for. No difficulty was found in making new arrangements. He gave us four fresh pack horses, five saddle horses, and two packers, and took all our horses, and Brown, Beaupre and Valad.

It was only two P.M. when Leitch came up; but his horses had been travelling all day, and as we were in a good place for feed and for our own dinner, he advised the camp should be pitched, and no movement onward made till the morrow, as time would really be gained by the delay. This was agreed to, the more readily because the chief had further instructions to write and send back by Mohun, and because the clouds that had been floating over the tops of the hills all day, and obscuring the lofty glacier cone of Robson's Peak, began to close in and empty themselves. Looking west down the valley of the Fraser, the narrow pass suddenly filled with rolling billows of mist. On they came, curling over the rocky summits rolling down to the forests, enveloping everything in their fleecy mantles. Out of them came great gusts of wind that nearly blew away our fires and tents; and after the gusts, the rain in smart showers. Once or twice the sun broke through, revealing the hill sides, all their autumn tints fresh and glistening after the rain, and the line of their summits near, and bold against the

Rev. George M. Grant-Ocean to Ocean--Sandford Fleming's Expedition through Canada in 1872; Toronto, Campbell; 1873.

Crossroads

sky; all, except Robson's Peak which showed its huge shoulders covered with masses of snow, but on whose high head clouds ever rested.

Brown made us a plum cake for tea, and in honour of this occasion, a tin of currant jam that had been put up to be eaten with mutton, if bighorn were shot, was produced. On being opened, it turned out to be only tomatoes, to our great disappointment, but still it was a variety from the routine fare, and relished accordingly.

September 19th

It rained during the night and the morning looked grey and heavy with clouds; but the sun shone before eleven o'clock, and the day turned out the finest since crossing the Yellow Head Pass. At 7.30 A.M. got off from the camp, giving a last cheer to Brown, Beaupre and Valad; and casting many a longing look behind to see if Robson's Peak would show its bright head to us. But only the snow-ribbed giant sides were visible, for the clouds still rested far down from the summit. Three miles from camp, beside the river, at a place called Mountain View, his great companions stood out from around him; but he remained hidden, and reluctantly we had to go on, without being as fortunate as Milton and Cheadle[early travellers].

Our new horses were in prime condition; but the road for the first eleven miles was extremely difficult; and last night's rain had made it worse. The trail follows down the Fraser to Tete Jaune Cache, when it leaves the river and turns south-east to go to the North Thompson, at right angles to the main course we had followed since entering the Caledonian Valley. The Fraser at the ~~lone~~ point changes its westerly for a northerly course, rushing like a race horse, for hundreds of miles north, when it sweeps round and comes south to receive the united waters of the North and South Thompson, before cutting through the Cascade Range and emptying into the ocean. Tete Jaune Cache is thus a great centre point. From it the valley of the Fraser extends to the north, and the same valley extends south by the banks of the Cranberry and of the Canoe rivers to the head of the Columbia, a continuous valley being thus formed parallel to the Rocky Mountains, and separating them from the Gold and Selkirk ranges.

1872

TRAILS TO GOLDFIELDS

Charles Horetzky

1872 was a big year for the Omineca and the Central Interior. Not only was the gold rush creating a stir, but C.P.R. survey crews appeared on the scene.

Much of this "railway" interest was prompted by a pamphlet, published in 1872, that supported using the Peace River as the pass for the C.P.R., through the Rockies. Malcolm McLeod, an Ottawa lawyer edited and published it, giving the account of Sir George Simpson's 1828 cross Canada trip, which made use of this pass. A journal, written by Chief Factor Archibald McDonald, who was travelling with Simpson was used for this publication.

After reaching Fort St. James in his "winter of '72" C.P.R. exploration travels, photographer-explorer Charles Horetzky strikes out in a northwesterly direction. He departed the Sandford Fleming cross-Canada expedition at Edmonton, in the company of Dr. Macoun, an eminent botanist, and then parted company with Macoun at Fort St. James; Horetzky going to the Pacific via the Skeena, Macoun headed for Quesnel.

Whereas the present rail line west of Prince George follows the Nechako, Bulkley and Skeena valleys, Horetzky, in seeking a route, year 1872, chose to swing west at Fort St. James, using the Susqua (now called Suskwa) river to the Skeena and Hazelton. By following him into the area west and north of Fort St. James, the reader learns first-hand of original access routes to the Omineca. Horetzky describes these, on the spot, on this trip.

Taken from *Canada on the Pacific, a Journey from Edmonton to the Pacific by the Peace River Valley, etc., Montreal, 1874*, by Charles Horetzky.

Goldfields

Viewed in the Local Reference Room at the Prince George Public Library. Publications such as this, broadcast the current news of the day, and aroused curiosity about the Omineca Gold fields.

But revenons à nos moutons, and I have here to crave the indulgence of the generous reader, who has borne me company so long, and who, perhaps, may have the curiosity to know how I fared on my solitary trip through the trackless wastes of Northern British Columbia. Well, after seeing the "lions" of Fort St. James, and enjoying the hospitality of Mr. Gavin Hamilton; after dining in great comfort with poor Judge Fitzgerald(since gone to his account), and his deputy, Captain Fitzstubbs, a fine, handsome, jovial fellow, in whose company--must I confess it?--some of the saloon keeper's brandy(for Stewart's[Stuart] Lake had reached that pitch of civilization, and actually could boast of a regularly organized whisky shop, where brandy-smashes, cocktails, and three card "monte" helped to ease the reckless miner of his hard-earned gains), found its way, in a temperate kind of style, down our throats, I very reluctantly resumed my weary tramp, which was to cease at whatever point on the coast I might be lucky enough to find the Hudson Bay Company's steamer, the *Otter*. Having secured the services of a Red River half-breed named Damare, and three others, all Indians, or "fractional parts" of that persuasion; having put up a good supply of bacon, beans, flour, tea and sugar, and being each provided with snow-shoes, moccasins, and plenty of blankets, I said farewell to Fort St. James, and took my departure for Fort Babine on foot. It was noon when we left: the ice being quite glare, and the men willing, we made ten miles in about a couple of hours, and camped on the west side of the lake. On reaching that shore we found, to our annoyance, that the ice was extremely thin, and, a little further on, there was open water. Our camp was made on a sloping rock within half-a-dozen feet of the water edge, for we could find no better ground. Dry wood was scarce, and after a fire was lighted we were nearly smoked to death, the wind having risen, causing us great inconvenience and discomfort. We were now without a tent, but carried with us a piece of factory cotton, which we stuck up behind us on poles, but speedily hauled down again, finding it do more harm than good. During the night snow began to fall, and this melting on our blankets from the heat of the fire, rendered matters more uncomfortable still. This was

Charles Horetzky-Canada on the Pacific, Being An Account of a Journey From Edmonton to the Pacific by the Peace River Valley, Montreal, 1874.

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truly ■ most wretched encampment, and was only the beginning of a series. While declining on our angular bed, we could still see the distant lights of the fort, and I most heartily wished myself back again in its snug quarters. The night was moderately warm, and we woke up next morning glad to relieve our aching bones, and anxious to get rid of our stiffness by good exercise, of which we soon got plenty, ■■ we had no longer any ice to walk on, and were obliged to follow the rugged beach, sometimes coming to ■ a projecting rocky point, the steep side of which we had to clamber. Sometimes, indeed, we had to take to the woods for short distances, and altogether we had ■ rough time of it.

The lake was now entirely open, and by 4 p.m., we had only reached a point opposite the Indian village of Pinche. We camped here, and, wearied by the exertions of the day, soon fell asleep.

Dec. 4th.--Tried the ice again this morning, but found it very weak; progress slow, being obliged to proceed cautiously, sounding the ice for the rest of the day, and camped opposite Tache Village. Ice nine inches thick, but ■■ Indian from the village tells us that a few miles above the lake is open to the very end, so more trouble looms up for to-morrow.

December 5th.--Travelled eight miles on the ice, and were again met by open water; halted for dinner, and sent on two of the young lads to the Portage for a canoe.

We left the baggage here, and the rest of us proceeded along the margin when practicable. After two hours of execrable walking, during which slips and falls were the rule, and upright walking was the exception, we reached the solid ice at the upper end, a short walk took ■■ to the little river, on the banks of which we camped.

I now determined to send on two men to the Babine Lake, seven or eight miles distant, with the heaviest of my baggage. They were then to start for Fort Babine by canoe, this lake usually remaining open till the end of January, while Damare, another man, and myself, were to branch off to the right, towards Lac Trembleur, whence I intended to strike north towards Lake Tacla, and then make for Fort Babine by "Leon's trail."

Having reached the first little lake in the middle of the portage, our party split up, two men proceeding to the Babine end of the portage, myself and two others following up this little lake for three or four miles, when we left it and immediately took the ice on another. Following this one for ■ mile or two, we came upon a large camp of Indians who were catching the finest trout and white fish I ever saw. They had thousands of them hung up on poles to dry. Their encampment was a perfect picture, what with the primitive and open

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lodges, the long rows of fish in the successive stages of desiccation, the half naked children sprawling about in the snow, the dogs too fat and lazy to move, and the numerous dug-outs or canoes hauled up on the beach. This lake was encircled by high hills, and the portion of it which we had come over, was hard and fast for the winter; while just here it was perfectly open and free from ice. We camped here for the purpose of getting one of those Indians to guide you to "Gus Wright's trail," which I was desirous of reaching by a short cut over the mountains.

The next morning we started in a canoe for the upper end of the lake, and resuming our snow-shoes, ascended the steep and rugged hills lying southwest of Lake Trembleur, keeping due north all the while. This was a very rough and disagreeable piece of road, and we were not sorry to get on to the so-called steamboat trail. It must be remarked here that a stern-wheel steamer was laid up for the winter in Lake Trembleur. This vessel, which I did not see, had been brought up the Fraser, the Nakosla River, through Stewart's Lake, and by the connecting stream, to its present winter quarters. It was owned, I believe, by one Gus Wright, who purposed to start a freight business between Lake Trembleur and the Tacla Landing, whence it is only a matter of about fifty miles to the "City of Hog'em," the capital, if I may apply such a term, of the Peace River gold mining regions. There are several ways by which these as yet embryo diggings may be reached from Victoria. The intending miner may, if he chooses, take steamer to Port Essington, six hundred miles up the coast, and thence ascend the Skeena to the infant town of Hazelton, otherwise more generally known as "The Forks." This implies the ascent (and a very difficult one it is) of this rapid, and, as it has proved to not a few unfortunates, fatal stream, for a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles. Leaving the treacherous waters of the Skeena, he may then proceed either on foot or on horseback to the Babine Lake, some fifty or sixty miles distant, crossing the lower extremity of which he keeps on by the same means to Tacla Landing, thirty or forty miles further, during which time he must cross a high mountain range by a pass known as that of the "Frying Pan." From the landing the mines are easily reached by a pretty fair trail.

The Fraser River presents another route. One may take stage to Quesnel, thence proceed on foot or on horseback across a partly level country to Fort St. James, whence a passable trail takes one to the Nation River ferry, from which there is a trail to Germansen Creek, and the Omenica [Omineca]; or instead of leaving the Fraser at Quesnel, the tourist may still follow that river until he reaches the Giscombe Portage. This must then be crossed, and launching

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his canoe in the waters of Summit Lake, the traveller may descend, aided by a very gentle current, the waters flowing into McLeod, whence eighty-nine miles of good and rapid navigation will take him to the Finlay branch. Here he must ascend the rapid current of the Omenica, for seventy-five miles, when German-sen Creek will be reached, and if he chooses to visit the capital, fifty miles more of the ~~sime~~ tortuous stream will bring him within sight of the spires(?) of "Hog'em." But all these routes are difficult, involving long and fatiguing journeys on foot, and navigation of a dangerous nature, which the miner is too often ready to try in craft ill-suited to the occasion.

1872

MACOUN'S VERSION

Dr. John Macoun

There is always two sides to a story. This is just as true for history, and possibly more so, as in everyday life. Dr. Macoun, the botanist with Sandford Fleming's 1872 cross-Canada expedition, who ended up travelling from Edmonton to Fort St. James, with Charles Horetzky, presented another version of their journey in his book *Autobiography of John Macoun*. We learn that he was pleased to part company with Mr. Horetzky... happy to get away with his life.

John Macoun 1831-1920, died in Sydney B.C., following a life devoted to exploring expeditions, collecting and cataloguing plants. He was a well known Canadian explorer and naturalist. His book was published by the Ottawa Field Naturalists' Club, 1922. From his book:

The next morning, Mr. Gaven Hamilton, who had charge of the post[Fort St. James], came to me and apologized for the bad quarters I had the night before and told me that Mr. Horetzky was arranging for my departure for Quesnel, and was putting up supplies. He said he had heard from Sinclair that I was on an equal footing with Horetzky on the expedition and he wished to know if this were so. I told him it was correct and showed him my credentials. He was greatly surprised; "Why," he said, "he is ordering all manner of luxuries

John Macoun *Autobiography of John Macoun, M.A.—Canadian Explorer and Naturalist, Assistant Director and Naturalist to the Geological Survey of Canada, 1831-1920*: A memorial volume published by the Ottawa Field Naturalists Club, 1922.

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for himself but, for you, he has just ordered what we usually give to our men." I told him that I did not care what I got as long as I got away from Horetzky with my life. He then assured me that in giving me the provisions for my trip my food would be as good as that of the head of the post.

Next day, I left for Quesnel, one hundred and forty-four miles distant. My companions were a half-breed called Murdoch, a splendid man, and with him a young Indian. These two were to be my companions down to the Fraser and with us we took provisions for ten days. This was carried on the backs of the two Indians and I had nothing to carry but my overcoat. . .

On the morning of the 17th, we started for Stuart river, but, before leaving, Mr. Hamilton took me aside and asked me if I had any matches. I told him I had none, so he supplied me with some and gave me besides a light skin coat so I could travel in it. Each one of us, when we started, carried a pair of snow-shoes, mine were nearly seven feet long, and, as I had never worn a snow-shoe in my life before, I felt very awkward, even in carrying them.

We walked along rapidly and reached Stuart river by dark and crossed it on the ice and slept in the cabin of the ferry-man as we were travelling on the Omineca trail. Of course, the ferry-man was not there, but we went in and made ourselves at home.

The next day, we walked along and, in the evening, reached the Nechaco. The river was nearly three hundred yards wide and covered with great hummocks of ice with the current rolling between. We were very doubtful as to whether we could cross it and Murdoch got a large pole and walked in front, trying the ice at every step while I came up in the rear in perfect safety. Some miles beyond the river we camped in a little hollow and, as this was our first camp, I may as well describe how we arranged matters the rest of the journey.

Every evening, when we arrived where we were to camp, which was always in a thicket of green timber, with lots of dry wood in the neighborhood, my business was to take a snow-shoe and clear the ground of snow where our camp was to be. Murdoch took his axe and went to the wood to get wood for the night. I always got a few small twigs for kindling. By the time Murdoch got the supply of wood for the night, the Indian boy and myself had finished getting the supper ready. I forgot to mention that my bed was the first under way and it was arranged so that my head would be away from the fire and my feet towards it.

I left my snow-shoes at Stuart river but the others took theirs with them. We were blessed with fine weather; very cold nights but no storms during the whole trip and we pushed on, day after day, as fast as possible but camped early in the afternoon and laid in a good stock of firewood for the night. As we passed

southward, the snow got deeper and at last it got so that it was just ■ inch or so above the knee cap, and only then did I find it fatiguing. As I had no burden to carry, I walked in front and broke the road for the other two. One afternoon, when it was almost time to camp, we suddenly came across the track of ■ snow-shoe in the snow and, without ado, we followed the snow-shoe till we came to ■ sylvan lodge in which we found an Indian, and his wife and daughter, and we were greeted with all the friendliness we could expect. I may make this remark, that all the Indians at that time, west of the mountains, could talk Chinook, and, no matter of what tribe they were, they always understood each other. We talked Chinook and enjoyed ourselves very much and remained there for the evening. In the morning, when we were leaving, Murdoch said to me that they had ■ number of fine fish there and thought it would be wise if I should purchase ■ few as our rations were getting low. I hadn't ■ cent of money with me, but I did have ■ red bandanna handkerchief, that cost twelve and a half cents, in my pocket. I pulled it out and held it out to the old wife and let her know that I wanted fish for it, and she brought out a pile of fine trout and Murdoch, who stood by, took out all he wanted.

Next day, we crossed the summit and began to go down towards Quesnel, and we found the travelling much better, but the cold increased. Our last night, before we reached Quesnel, was the coldest we had experienced and it was hard work to keep ourselves warm before we started to walk. Early in the afternoon, we reached the Fraser opposite Quesnel and found the river choked with ice moving slowly down with the current. The ferry-man refused to cross and, as we had finished our provisions, we were desirous to do so. He considered and then said, "If you will take the risk, you may have the canoe and go over yourselves, but I will not take you." Murdoch went out and took ■ view of the river and said to me, "If you are not afraid to go I will risk it." I said, "Certainly, I will go if you say you can cross." After getting directions from Murdoch as to what I should have to do, we entered the canoe and ran up alongside of the ice about ■ quarter of a mile and as soon as we got an opening, steered straight for the other side, but we were forced down greatly by the accumulation of ice packs until, when we got past Quesnel, we were still fifty yards from the shore and the whole population of the village watched us. By hard work and God's help, we reached the shore about one hundred yards below Quesnel and were soon landed and my long journey had ended for I had now only four hundred miles to go by stage and another two hundred to Victoria and I would be in civilization again.

1873

GERMANSEN CREEK

Sir Wm Butler

To introduce our next traveller we take a passage from Sir Sandford Fleming's *1889 Report Royal Society of Canada*.

"General, then Captain, W.F. Butler left England in 1872, and travelled by way of Minnesota to Red River. He found the village of Fort Garry, afterwards to be known as the city of Winnipeg, under the excitement of an election, the first which had taken place. On October 4th he left for the Northwest. Reaching the forks of the Saskatchewan his intention being to make this place a central point from which the buffalo could be hunted, he remained in this neighbourhood until February, when with a dog-train he started for the west and reached Fort Carleton. On the 11th of that month he left Fort Carleton and passed by the way of Methye portage, the river Athabasca and Athabasca Lake to Peace River. He ascended the Peace River valley, followed the Finlay or North Branch to Ominica[Omineca], and ascended a western tributary to Germansen. From Germansen he passed overland to Fort St. James. Leaving this point on May 25th he travelled southerly to Quesnel on the Fraser, where he arrived on June 3rd. At Quesnel he came within reach of the appliances of civilization to carry him to New Westminster. On his return to England, General Butler published an account of his travels entitled *The Wild North Land, being the story of a winter journey with dogs across Northern North America*.

This book was popular at the time it was written[1873] and has remained a travel book that is much in demand.

He was travelling at a time when the location of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which would traverse the new dominion, was the burning question of the hour and decade, and his remarks and appendixes showed he had a

keen interest in where the railway would eventually be built through the Rockies.

This book was one of the drawing cards, when, in 1949, R.M. Patterson, author and adventurer, was lured to the Finlay River. He then told about this canoe travels and past journeys of others from "mouth to source" in his book *Finlay's River*. One special passage of Butler's *The Black Canyon of the Omineca*[not dealt with here], which has often been retold, captured Patterson's fancy especially, and the reader is able to see, through Patterson's descriptions, a recap of conquering this early obstacle of nature[gone now with the formation of Williston Lake behind Bennett dam].

Butler's book is one of many valuable early publications that Hurtig Publishers, M.G. Hurtig Ltd., of Edmonton have reprinted and made available to the public.

In this excerpt Butler heads south to Quesnel from the Peace River, approaching Fort St.James from the north on a route used by many travellers, miners, construction workers, hunting and fishing safaris, tourists and transports from early times to the present, that with-holds many haunting secrets.

His brief but true-ringing account of this trip at this early date is a precious heritage he left for future residents, history buffs, and adventure book readers. Cerf-vola, the Untiring – Butler's dog, was his faithful companion.

We worked slowly on, now holding by the bushes that hung out from the forest shore, now passing ropes around rocks and tree stumps, and dragging, poling, pushing, as best we could. The unusual toil brought out the worst characteristics of my crew. Kalder worked like a horse with a savage temper, and was in a chronic state of laying violent hands upon the English miner, who, poor fellow, worked his best, but failed to satisfy the expectations of the more athletic Indian. It was no easy matter to keep the peace between them, and once, midway in a rapid, my Indian leaped past me in the canoe, seized the unoffending miner, and hurled him to the bottom of the boat. This was too much. I caught hold of a paddle and quickly informed my red servitor that if he did

General Sir William Francis Bulter, *The Wild North Land, being the Story of a Winter Journey, with Dogs, across Northern North America*, London, 1873.

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not instantly loosen his hold, my paddle would descend upon his hot-tempered head; he cooled a little, and we resumed our upward way.

But for all this Kalder was a splendid fellow. In toil, in difficulty, in danger, alone he was worth two ordinary men; and in camp no better wild man lived to cut, to carry, or to cook; to pitch a tent, or portage a load--no, not from Yukon to wild Hudson's Bay.

On the night of the 19th of May we reached the mouth of the Wolverine Creek, and camped at last by quiet water. We were worn and tired from continuous toil. The ice-cold water in which we so frequently waded, and which made the pole-handles like lumps of ice to the touch, had begun to tell on hands and joints. Nevertheless, when at night the fire dried our dripping clothes and warmed us again, the plate of pemmican and cup of tea were relished, and we slept that sleep which is only known when the pine-trees rock the tired wanderer into forgetfulness.

The last rapid was passed, and now before us lay a broad and gentle current, lying in long serpentine bends amid lofty mountains. So, on the morning of the 20th, we paddled up towards the mining camp with easy strokes. Around us lay misty mountains, showing coldly through cloud-rift and billowy vapour. The high altitude, to which by such incessant labour we had worked our way, was plainly visible in the backward vegetation. We were nearing the snow-line once more, but still the sheltered valleys were bursting forth into green, and spring was piercing the inmost fastness of these far-north hills.

And now I parted with the Ominica. It lay before us, far stretching to the westward, amid cloud-capped cliffs and snowy peaks; known to the gold-seeker for seventy miles yet higher and deeper into the land of mountains, and found there to be still a large, strong river, flowing from an unknown west.

And yet it is but one of that score of rivers which, 2500 miles from these mountains, seek the Arctic Sea, through the mighty gateway of the Mackenzie.

Late on the evening of the 20th of May I reached the mining camp of Germansen, three miles south of the Ominica River. A queer place was this mining camp of Germansen, the most northern and remote of all the mines on the American continent.

Deep in the bottom of a valley, from whose steep sides the forest had been cleared or burned off, stood some dozen or twenty well-built wooden houses; a few figures moved in the dreary valley, ditches and drains ran along the hill-sides, and here and there men were at work with pick and shovel in the varied toil of gold-mining.

The history of Germansen Creek had been the history of a thousand other creeks on the western continent. A roving miner had struck the glittering pebbles; the news had spread. From Montana, from Idaho, from California, Oregon, and Cariboo, men had flocked to this new find in the far north. In 1871, 1200 miners had forced their way through almost incredible hardships to the new field; provisions reached a fabulous price; flour and pork sold at six and seven shillings a pound! The innumerable sharks that prey upon the miner flocked in to reap the harvest; some struck the golden dust, but the majority lost everything, and for about the twentieth time in their lives became "dead broke;" little was known of the severity of the season, and many protracted the time of their departure for more southern winter quarters. Suddenly, on their return march, the winter broke; horses and mules perished miserably along the forest trail. At length the Frazer River was reached, a few canoes were obtained, but the ice was fast filling in the river. The men crowded into the canoes till they were filled to the edge; three wretched miners could find no room; they were left on the shore to their fate; their comrades pushed away. Two or three days later the three castaways were found frozen stiff on the inhospitable shore.

The next summer saw fewer miners at the Camp, and this summer saw fewer still; but if to-morrow another strike were to be made 500 miles to the north of this remote Camp, hundreds would rush to it, caring little whether their bones were left to mark the long forest trail. The miner has ever got his dream of an El Dorado fresh and sanguine. No disaster, no repeated failure will discourage him. His golden paradise is always "away up" in some half-inaccessible spot in a wilderness of mountains. Nothing daunts him in this wild search of his. Mountains, rivers, canons are the enemies he is constantly wrestling with. Nature has locked her treasures of gold and silver in deep mountain caverns, as though she would keep them from the daring men who strive to rob her. But she cannot save them. When one sees this wonderful labour, this delving into the bowels of rock and shingle, this turning and twisting of river channel, and sluicing and dredging and blasting, going on in these strange out-of-the-way places, the thought occurs, if but the tenth part of this toil were expended by these men in the ordinary avocations of life, they would all be rich or comfortable...

In the bottom of the valley, between the wooden houses and the rushing creek of Germansen, I pitched my tent for a short time, and in the course of a few days had the honour of becoming acquainted, either personally or by reputation, with Doe English, Dancing Bill, Black Jack, Dirty-faced Pete, Ned Walsh, Rufus Sylvester, and several others among the leading "boys" of the

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northern mining country. I found them men who under the rough garb of mountain miners had a large and varied experience in wild life and adventure--generous, free-hearted fellows too, who in the race for gold had not thrown off as dead weight, half as much of human kindness as many of their brothers, who, on a more civilized course, start for the same race too.

On the evening of my arrival at Germansen Mr. Rufus Sylvester appeared from the south, carrying the mail for the camp. Eleven days earlier he had started from Quesnelle on the Fraser River; the trail was, he said, in a very bad state; snow yet lay five feet deep on the Bald, and Nation River Mountains; the rivers and streams were running bank-high; he had swum his horses eleven times, and finally left them on the south side of the Bald Mountains, coming on foot to his destination. The distance to Quesnelle was about 330 miles. Such was a summary of his report.

The prospect was not encouraging; but where movement is desired, if people wait until prospects become encouraging, they will be likely to rest stationary a long time. My plan of movement to the south was this: I would dispense with everything save those articles absolutely necessary to travel; food and clothing would be brought to the lowest limits, and then, with our goods on our shoulders, and with Cerf-vola carrying on his back a load of dry meat sufficient to fill his stomach during ten days, we would set out on foot to cross the Bald Mountains. Thirty miles from the mining Camp, at the south side of the mountain range, Rufus Sylvester had left a horse and a mule; we would recover them again, and, packing our goods upon them, make our way to Fort St. James on the wild shores of Stuart's Lake--midway on our journey to where, on the bend of the Frazer River, the first vestige of civilization would greet us at the city called Quesnelle.

It was the 25th of May when, having loaded my goods upon the back of a Hydah Indian from the coast, and giving Kalder a lighter load to carry, I set off with Cerf-vola for the south. Idleness during the past three weeks had produced a considerable change in the person of the Untiring. He had grown fat and round, and it was no easy matter to strap his bag of dry meat upon his back so as to prevent it performing the feat known, in the case of a saddle on a horse's back, by the term "turning." It appeared to be a matter of perfect indifference to the Untiring whether the meat destined for his stomach was carried beneath that portion of his body or above his back; he pursued the even tenure of his way in either case, but a disposition on his part to "squat" in every pool of water or patch of mud along the trail, perfectly regardless of the position of his ten days' rations, had the effect of quickly changing its nature, when it was

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underneath him, from dry meat to very wet meat, and making the bag which held it ■ kind of water-cart for the drier portions of the trail.

Twelve miles from Germansen Creek stood the other mining camp of Mansen[Manson]. More ditches, more drains, more miners, more drinking; two or three larger saloons; more sixes and sevens of diamonds and debilitated looking kings and queens of spades littering the dusty street; the wrecks of "faro" and "poker" and "seven up" and "three-card monti;" more Chinamen and Hydah squaws than Germansen could boast of; and Mansen lay the same miserable-looking place that its older rival had already appeared to me. Yet every person was kind and obliging. Mr. Grahame, postmaster, dealer in gold-dust, and general merchant, cooked with his own hands ■ most excellent repast, the discussion of which was followed by further introductions to mining celebrities. Prominent among many Joes and Davises and Petes and Bills, I recollect one well-known name; it was the name of Smith. We have all known, I presume, some person of that name. We have also known innumerable prefixes to it, such as Sydney, Washington, Buckingham, &c., &c., but here at Mansen dwelt ■ completely new Smith. No hero of ancient or modern times had been called on to supply a prefix or ■ second name, but in the person of Mr. Peace River Smith I recognized a new title for the old and familiar family.

Mr. Stirling's saloon at Mansen was a very fair representation of what, in this country, we would call a "public-house," but in some respects the saloon is eminently patriotic. Western America, and indeed America generally, takes its "cocktails" in the presence of soul-stirring mementoes; from above the lemons, the coloured wine-glass, the bunch of mint, and the many alcoholic mixtures which stand behind the bar--General Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and President Grant look placidly upon the tippling mine; but though Mr. Stirling's saloon could boast its card-tables, its patriotic pictures, and its many "slings" and "juleps," in one important respect it fell far short of the ideal mining paradise. It was not ■ hurdy-house; music and dancing were both wanting. It was ■ serious drawback, but it was explained to me that Mansen had become too much "played out" to afford to pay the piper, and hurdies had never penetrated to the fastnesses of the Peace River mines.

When the last mining hero had departed, I lay down in Mr. Grahame's sanctum, to snatch ■ few hours' sleep ere the first dawn would call us to the march. I lay on the postmaster's bed while that functionary got together his little bags of gold-dust, his few letters and mail matters for my companion, Rufus Sylvester the express man. This work occupied him until shortly before dawn, when he abandoned it to again resume the duties of cook in preparing my break-

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fast. Day was just breaking over the pine-clad hills as we bade adieu to this kind host, and with rapid strides set out through the sleeping camp. Kalder, the Hydah Indian, and the Untiring, had preceded us on the previous evening, and I was alone with the express man, Mr. Rufus Sylvester. He carried on his back a small, compact, but heavy load, some 600 ounces of gold-dust being the weightiest item; but, nevertheless, he crossed with rapid steps over the frozen ground. We carried in our hands snowshoes for the mountain range still lying some eight miles away. The trail led o'er hill and through valley, gradually ascending for the first six miles, until through breaks in the pines I could discern the snowy ridges towards which we were tending. Soon the white patches lay around us in the forest, but the frost was severe, and the surface was hard under our moccasins. Finding the snow-crust was sufficient to bear our weight, we cached the snow-shoes and held our course up the mountain. Deeper grew the snow; thinner and smaller became the pines--dwarf things that hung wisps of blue-green moss from their shrunken limbs. At last they ceased to be around us, and the summit-ridges of the Bald Mountain spread out under the low-hung clouds. The big white ptarmigan bleated like sheep in the tin frosty air. We crossed the topmost ridge, where snow ever dwells, and saw beneath a far-stretching valley. I turned to take a last look to the north; the clouds had lifted, the sun had risen some time; away over an ocean of peaks lay the lofty ridge I had named Galty More a fortnight earlier, when emerging from the Black Canon. He rose above us then the monarch of the range; now he lay far behind, one of the last landmarks of the Wild North Land.



Old Omineca gold rush town believed to be Manson Creek. These relics from the 1870's were photographed by Frank Swannell about 1911. Courtesy B.C. Provincial Archives.



Ca 1882 photo of what was once Germansen Lake gold mining town. Kenton and daughter Bessie, Ezra Evans and Charlie McKinnon. Courtesy B.C. Provincial Archives.



Dawson's party, Fort McLeod, 1879. G.M. Dawson third from left. National Archives of Canada /PA 18100



Fort McLeod, B.C. 1879. Built by Simon Fraser in 1805. It was the first permanent settlement west of the Rocky Mountains. National Archives of Canada/PA51135

1874

SECRETAN AND THE MULES

J. H. E. Secretan

J.H.E. Secretan has a light, humorous approach to what some might consider weighty problems. In his book *Canada's Great Highway: From the Driving of the First Stake in 1871 to the driving of the last spike in 1885*, he came across as ■ man highly qualified to do his job, and thusly able to make "light" of very primitive situations.

He joined the CPR as an assistant engineer in 1871. In 1874, while surveying on the Upper Fraser, it was his good fortune to be appointed first officer or transit man under H.P. Bell.

The subject of mules fascinated Secretan, and in this excerpt he shows why.

In *Canada's Great Highway*, Secretan includes stories about animals and men, as well as telling about trials and tribulations of early surveying with the C.P.R., in his job of engineer, while travelling upstream on the Upper Fraser River.

After establishing the latitude, and altitude above sea-level by ■ series of boiling point thermometrical experiments, we planted our initial zero stake and started next morning to hack our way through the gloomy forest in the direction of Tete Jaune Cache. The country was heavily timbered, principally with big Douglas Fir and Cedar, and I think it rained there night and day continuous-

J.H.E. Secretan *Canada's Great Highway, From the Driving of the First Stake in 1871 to the Driving of the Last Spike in 1885*. London, 1924.

ly--until it snowed. I remember quite well that our blankets and spare clothes were mildewed from constant moisture. There was also a charming novelty in the shape of underbrush known as "Devil's Club." This huge cabbage, when in its prime, grows to be ten or twelve feet high, the muscular stalks and the under side of its immense leaves being armed with formidable spikes. After slashing your way through a mile or two of these all day, you generally sit up all night picking the festering spikes out of your knees--an innocent amusement but very painful. There are many people, I suppose, in Canada who have never heard of this interesting vegetable.

And now I was at work with the new skipper whose mind was obsessed with ideas of nautical navigation to be applied on dry land, bound for Tete Jaune Cache on the Upper Fraser River. As I have said, this country was generally heavily timbered down to the water's edge; graceful little saplings from eight to twelve feet in diameter and a couple of hundred feet high decorated the landscape. There were few open spaces. We had not only to cut out the line but also a trail for the pack-train.

We reached the Willow River, which flows through a delightful valley, before entering the Fraser, and as it had a fine pasture of grass and pea vine for our animals, we halted there for several days. Our mules improved and the cattle simply rolled in fat.

A pack-train of mules is real society and most entertaining. We had seventy-five or eight of them, including the saddle animals and a few horses. It took only four men to handle this bunch, a "Cargador," who is the boss, and three assistants with a cook. Our "Cargador" was an Irishman (which is unusual) named McAvoy, and the others were Mexicans.

The methods of these experts are most interesting. No matter how many mules there may be, they are all christened, and it was often a puzzle to me how they could possibly be distinguished by their names, as "all mules looked alike to me"; but so it was, and it seemed to come quite easy to the men, and also to the mules, who appeared to answer quickly when addressed by their proper name. They seemed to be nearly all named after the Apostles. I remember there was Saint Paul, Peter, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, with quite a number of Spanish notables, mostly saints, in our train. The Mexican gent who officiated as first mate to the "Cargador," whose official title I forget, rejoiced in the name of "Jesus Merino." The daily proceedings when on the move were weird and wonderful.

The usual march was never more than sixteen miles, but long before daylight, the "Matador" whose duty it was to round up the mules sleepily arose

and disappeared in the morning mist, returning in an hour or two with the whole band. They always have a "bell mare" which is ridden at the head of the column, and the others religiously follow, jealously pushing and shoving each other in their frantic endeavors to reach the tinkling bell. So the first thing to do in the morning is to catch the "bell mare" and ride her into camp, when all the rest follow like sheep, which makes it easy.

The "aparajos" or pack saddles are always formed up into a large circle, upon arriving at camp, and the cargo neatly piled in the centre. When the train was rounded up in the morning, each and every mule seemed to know his own place instinctively and solemnly faced his own particular "aparajo" on the outside of the circle, when all were linked together with a "hackamore," a kind of rope halter. Then Saint Paul would be led into the centre of the ring, blindfolded with a small board hitched behind his long ears, and loaded with a couple of one hundred pound sacks of flour on either side, topped off perhaps with a chest of tea for luck.

The mysteries of the "diamond hitch" were then swiftly performed by a couple of packers, when Saint Paul, tightly cinched up until his stomach looked like an hourglass, grunted, and was dismissed with a kick, and another victim selected to take his place. All this was done with bewildering rapidity, amidst a few cursory remarks from the Mexican packers, such as, "come here, Saint Peter! Ho, Pete! You lop-eared descendent of an apostolic son of a wall-eyed ancestor! Hey, Luke! You miserable offspring of a female coyote, where in hell do you think you are going, to San Francisco?" or words to that effect but more picturesque, until at last they were all "packed". The bell mare, generally ridden by the cook, jingled gaily away on the lead, and the whole train followed, flanked on either side by the Mexicans, well mounted on pet mules, while the lordly "Cargador," smoking a cigarette, brought up the rear. Day after day this might go on, and it is still a mystery to me, after all these years, how on earth those men knew one mule from another, and how the mules knew their apostolic names.

A mule is certainly a wonderful study when you are intimately associated with him for any length of time. He is absolutely unlike a horse. He is not properly constructed; his ears are too large and his feet are too small, consequently when he attempts to cross soft places he invariably sinks out of sight and nothing saves him but his ears, but if he tries to swim, his small feet are against him, and if he gets any water in his ears he gives up all hope and generally drowns. Thus the mule is severely handicapped. I often wondered if they understood the remarks made to them by the packers and sometimes thought that

Secretan

I detected a furtive smile on the apostolic countenance of the poor beast of burden, — the blind was removed from one end and he received a parting kick from the supercargo at the other.

After leaving the Willow River valley, the line of course naturally followed up the Fraser, sometimes quite close to the water, at others cutting off points when practicable, but always in the shadow of the forest of giant trees and rank undergrowth. It was useless stopping because of wet weather and so we were absolutely soaked to the skin all day long, as we hacked our way through the wilderness.

The pack-train was used to transport our supplies so long as feed could be found for the animals, but after several days browsing on boughs and leaves, and when some of them began to gnaw the succulent bark of the trees and did not hesitate to chew up the gunny sacks that had contained bacon, it was time to send them back where the grass grew, and after that we had to use boats and canoes for transportation. A large sail boat which had been hired at the Stewart[Stuart] River, near Fort George, was being slowly "tracked up" the river for the return of our party in the fall.

1874

REGULATIONS OBSERVED

J. H. E. Secretan

Long have I roamed these dreary plains,
I've used up horses, men and brains;
And, oft from virtue's path I've strayed
To find a fifty-two foot grade.
But now, thank God, I'll take a rest,
Content, I've done my level best;
To this green Earth I'll say farewell
And run a Railway line through Hell."

from *Canada's Great Highway*
by J.H.E. Secretan

In this passage to follow, also from *Canada's Great Highway*, Secretan pays tribute to the quality of work strived for by the C.P.R. engineer and Engineer-in-Chief, Sandford Fleming. Earlier in the book he pays tribute to the character of this man, famous for the role he played in building the Canadian Pacific Railway as well as for other endeavors:

" . . . was a Scotchman of the finest type, handsome, rugged as a block of his native granite, determined and sometimes obstinate, but of a kindly disposition to his subordinates and first, last and always, a gentleman. The task imposed upon him as pathfinder for this tremendous trans-continental trail would have overawed most men, but it did not daunt Sir Sandford."

Secretan also brings up the subject of the final route chosen for the C.P.R., a subject he returned to further on in the book:

Regulations

"I have often been asked why the C.P.R. went through the "Kicking Horse Pass" instead of the "Yellow Head," the latter being well known to have moderate gradients and being far easier for construction. I can only say, as I have attempted to explain in this book, that the rumoured reasons seem to have been because Van Horne put his finger on the map, and, Czar like, demanded the "shortest possible commercial line," which no doubt he got; then, as I have also mentioned, Major Rogers reported favourably of the "Kicking Horse" and finally, it seemed, this euphonious name appealed to the sporting instinct of the London Stock Exchange and the English controllers of the money market who were handling the C.P.R. stock. Be that as it may, the prairie section was rushed to completion heading for what is now the City of Calgary on the Bow River, the fat was in the fire, and it was *Kicking Horse or bust.*"

Here the party has just travelled downstream on the Upper Fraser River, to Fort George, the summer's work being completed.

Eventually we got off[the Giscome Portage Rapids] by good luck and after much pumping reached the vicinity of Fort George and there we camped.

That night it blew a hurricane and my little leveller, McLellan, a cautious Scotchman, who slept in my tent, when the tops of the tall cottonwoods were snapping off all round us, beseeched me with tears of fright in his eyes to go down and sleep on the boat, which he himself subsequently did, but as I was fairly comfortable in my blankets I told him that in my humble opinion if Providence was really interested in us that day there was a better chance to have made an end of us in the Giscombe Portage Rapids than by falling a tree on us; so I remained where I was and slept the sleep of the innocent.

Next day my worthy chieftain proposed that I should take the boat on down to Quesnelle, running the Fort George and Cottonwood Canyons, but I declined the honour with thanks, preferring the "hurricane deck" of the harmless mule.

Our Summer's work was over and we were now bound for home. I cannot help reflecting upon the thorough, accurate and complete manner in which all the surveys were made for the great Canadian highway. No matter how remote and inaccessible the district to which we were sent, the procedure was

Regulations

just the same. The regulations laid down by Sir Sandford Fleming were always religiously observed to the letter by his District Engineers, Divisional Engineers and their subordinates. Sometimes there would be a lonely explorer with a compass and aneroid and a couple of Indians, to determine the height of a reported feasible pass, and then these would be followed perhaps by a survey party, running a trial line, with continuous sea-levels, and the next year by a locating party, who would finally locate the line, running in the curves, etc.

Many of these lines were of course abandoned when the final decision was made, but I am certain that absolutely nothing was neglected by Sir Sandford Fleming during his career as Chief Engineer, and when the time came to hand things over to the C.P.R. Company, in 1880, the immense volume of information collected by him was absolutely accurate. Nearly everything was known and very little had been left undone.

To test the truth of this assertion we have only to look at subsequent events. The C.P.R. Company changed the location of the line from Winnipeg West for reasons which I shall attempt to explain later on, but the Yellow Head Pass selected by the Government, upon the recommendation of Sir Sandford Fleming, was afterwards adopted by the other two Transcontinental lines, the Canadian Northern and the Grand Trunk Pacific, many years afterwards, and both of them, as I happen to know, ran over our *old original stakes* in many places.

This ought to establish the fact that Sir Sandford's judgement was sound and his foresight remarkable.

A LITTLE TRAMP OF EIGHTEEN HUNDRED MILES

In order to emphasize these opinions of mine I must not forget to remark that in the Fall of 1874, when on my way home, passing through Quesnelle, I shook hands with E.W. Jarvis and C.F. Hanington and wished them good luck. They were fitting out for a winter trip through the Smoky River Pass, which had been reported as feasible.

They had got together some Indians and about thirteen dogs of different denominations. Although suffering untold hardships they accomplished that long trek across those icy barriers and having eaten their last dog arrived at Edmonton in the Spring of 1875, very emaciated but alive. And I have no doubt the report of these gentlemen eventually found its way into the blue books of Canada, but their personal loyalty and bravery can never be over-estimated.

1874

12 DAYS WITH DOG SLEDS

C. F. Hanington

In 1874-75 a C.P.R. exploration was made of a route from Fort George through the Smoky River Pass to Edmonton, but the elevation was found to be five thousand, three hundred feet, which was regarded as prohibitive in that latitude. The southern and central portions of British Columbia having been by this time well travelled over, it was determined to limit the year's work to the country north of Bute Inlet and Tete Jaune Cache. A trail location from Bute Inlet following the Nazco Valley to Stuart River was made, and an exploratory survey from Dean Channel up the Salmon River, meeting the line to Bute Inlet in the valley of the Blackwater. Parties were also at work exploring in the vicinity of Gardner Inlet and the Pine River Pass.

Here we concern ourselves with the trip, made in the depth of winter, through the Smoky River Pass, which nearly ended in disaster. The telling of this story makes incredible reading. Fortunately it was recorded twice, by E.W. Jarvis, who was in charge, and C.F. Hanington, his assistant. It is Hanington's record of the trip to Fort George from Quesnel we will read here.

Many of the early surveyor's and explorers in the Central Interior of British Columbia took part in the larger overall job of engineering the progress of this young nation of Canada, and C.F. Hanington was no exception.

A.L. Herne wrote an article, *Blazing Canada's Trail of Steel*, about Major Hanington when he died and it appeared in the February eight issue of the Province newspaper, in 1931. From this write-up a few facts were gleaned.

Chas Hanington was born at Shedia New Brunswick April 14, 1848. He graduated from college in 1871 and came to British Columbia for the first

Dog sleds

time in 1873, surveying through Marble Canyon, Bonaparte Valley, Bridge River, etc. 1874 saw him back in B.C. where he helped run the first survey line down the Fraser River from the summit of the Yellowhead Pass west.

It was during this winter--of '74-'75, when the incredible, and nearly ill-fated journey, partially covered in this chapter, took place.

The total journey from Fort George to Winnipeg took 116 days, covering 1887 miles, with 932 traversed on snow-shoes. For twenty consecutive days in January the thermometer averaged 37 degrees below zero. Mr. Jarvis' narrative of the journey is included in the *Canadian Pacific Railway Report of 1877*. Mr. Hanington's diary is given in the report of *Canadian Archives for 1887*.

From C.F. Hanington's report:

Fort George, B.C., 19th Dec., 1874

I wrote you on the eve of our departure from Quesnelle and I now continue from that point. We got away from Quesnelle on the 8th about 12 noon with teams pretty well loaded with grub and other supplies. Ben Gillis "set it out for us," and the whole town turned out to bid us "God speed." They had a very exalted idea of the pleasure to be derived from our trip across the mountains and we heard many prophecies in regard to our going to destruction. In fact the last words we heard were "God bless you old fellows--good-bye; this is the last time we will see you," &c., &c., not a very pleasant starter but we came off in no very desponding frame of mind. We found the trail for a short distance very good, it having been kept broken by some ranchmen who live a short distance above, but it was hilly and side hill at that, so that with upsets, broken sled and other disasters being the results, we found ourselves at dark only 3 miles from Quesnelle. We struck for the last house and got to Pollock's at 6, rather used up and having left one load behind. Pollock was kind and gave us a supper and a place for the dogs who also were played out.

The next day we mended broken sleds and broke a track a few miles out so that the start might be a good one. I also went back and brought up the cached sled. On the 10th we made a fresh start, and left some of our stores at Pollock's, as the sleds were altogether too heavy for such a trail as this promised to turn out, and here I might say a word about the trail. It was built by some

C.F. Hanington, *Journal of Mr. C.F. Hanington from Quesnelle through the Rocky Mountains, during the winter of 1874-5 given in The Report of Canadian Archives for 1887*(pp.cx,cxxii.)

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telegraph company (I forget which) who proposed to run a telegraph line up north to Behring's Straits and thence to Asia by a short cable. The line was actually in working order for some 200 miles, when the news of the success of the Atlantic cable put a stop to the operations. The director and promoters of the scheme died of the disappointment, and the company left everything as it then was. The wire now hangs broken and twisted from the posts, the greater part of the offices ~~were~~ burned down and the only result of such a vast expenditure of money is the trail we take on our way to Fort George. On the 10th we took a final leave of civilization and started off. After a hard day we made camp only 7 miles from Pollock's or 10 miles from Quesnelle. Our camp was most primitive, being a piece of cotton thrown over poles stuck in the snow sloping towards the fire. This served to keep the wind from our heads at any rate and we certainly were able to enjoy a good sleep after the day's labours.

On the 13th we were 45 miles from Quesnelle, having had some fearfully bad trail over sidehill and deep snow. Of course side hills are good enough for mule trains but when you try dogs you will find they won't work worth a cent. The dogs go straight enough but the sled won't keep after them, being more inclined to seek the valley below. So as you can imagine it requires a good deal of work and patience to keep the sled in the road while the dogs haul.

The 13th was Sunday, and we had a very heavy fall of snow, but were able to make 12 miles that day. As the snow was now very heavy I gave my train to Johnny and went ahead with Jarvis, who in addition to the work of breaking track had been very busy all the time counting his steps, so as to get the correct distance. Henceforth I shared his labour, and I can't say that I like pacing distances. Hard work it is to break track, but when you have anything to think of it is pleasanter. But when you walk all day and think of nothing but 1, 2, 3&c., &c., it is monotonous enough for anything. However, all this is a part and a necessary one of the proposed exploration, and I shan't growl at anything we have had so far.

We had a hard bit of work at the Blackwater River, 50 miles from Quesnelle. The river is bridged by poles and telegraph wire, but on this side it is bare ground and the hill is very steep indeed. The poor dogs did their best to get up, but the end of the matter was that we hauled the loads and they looked on. I went back to my own train, and with three men hauling, we got it up at last, but I am afraid my whip did more than its share of duty that day. We got on top of the hill about noon, and had rest and lunch there. We now had about two feet of snow, which was very soft and clung to our snowshoes in great masses; it was

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also very hard on the dogs, this wading through snow, only freshly beaten down by two pair of snowshoes.

On account of the heavy snow we had, on the 16th, to make another cache (No.2) of provisions, stationery box, &c., and on the 17th one of our sleds rolled down a steep side hill, and when recovered wasn't worth much, except as kindling wood. The dogs were all right; how they manage themselves I don't know, so we had to cache what stuff we could spare, put some on the one remaining sled, and take the rest on our backs, the four dogs running with only their harness to trouble them (Cache No. 3.)

I forgot to mention that after crossing the Blackwater we left the telegraph trail, which goes on north, and took a C.P.R. trail to Fort George. This latter is if possible a worse one than the telegraph trail. At noon on the 18th, as we were at lunch, an Indian from Fort George came along, and in reply to our questions said we wouldn't get to the fort that night, as it was "siah," a long way. This Indian had a small dog, on which he had his kettle, blanket and grub, he himself carrying the axe and some fuel. Happy thought for us, why not make these beasts of ours do some of our work, and take the packs which are wearing our shoulders away. No sooner said than done, we loaded them and started, Jarvis ahead, counting one, two, three, I next, calling along the packed dogs, and Johnny behind, poking up the lagging ones with a stick. Alec drove the sled behind. It was a comic sight to see the dogs who had never packed before, go rolling from side to side with their loads. As sure as one would try to jump a log, the weight of the load would tumble him back, and if he did manage to get on the top of the log, the weight would tumble him forward in the snow, where he would lie till helped up, but they soon got used to it and were able to follow us, and we went at a good pace, being on a hard track and in a hurry. At any rate we got into Fort George about 5 p.m. that (last) night, though Alec and his train didn't arrive for some hours after. Distance by our pacing, 125 miles from Quesnelle. By the river it would have been 83 miles. We spent 12 days on the way, one of which was at Pollock's. Greatest distance we did was on the last day, 23 miles. On the way we had used up one sled completely, and the other is fit for nothing now. We made three caches, containing in all about two-thirds of our original loads. This looks bad for our future journey, of which this is scarcely a beginning, but then the road we have come over is a most fearful one, while the river which we will follow from here will we trust be much better. At any rate, as we express it, "the country is quite safe," meaning we are quite safe. The country between Quesnelle and here is wooded, in some places burnt over, in others green. It is very hilly and broken, and the trail generally

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runs from the top of one hill to the top of the next, making it first rate for a telegraph line, but very tough on dogs and us. On the whole it is the worst place I ever saw to do this kind of travelling, and I shall never try it again.

We found Fort George in charge of Mr. Bovil, a son of the Chief Justice of England. With him is staying Charlie Ogden from Stewart's Lake Post. He, the latter, came down to help us get a fair start, and seems very ready to put us in the way of getting dogs, men, &c.

After supper last night we lit our pipes, and we spent the evening discussing the plans to be adopted &c., &c. Ogden is pretty well posted in the country. Bovil is just out from England, and consequently very green in these matters. He is a gentleman and a good cook. As his rations in the H.B.Co don't amount to more than 24 lbs. dried salmon per week, flour and tea in addition, he won't have much chance to exercise his knowledge of the culinary art. At present he *has killed one of his working oxen* and we are living well. What he will do for his next year's crop I don't know, but he hates the sight of a dried salmon and I hardly wonder at it. I'll put some more to this shortly.

FORT GEORGE, Dec. 20th.

On the 19th we had a square loaf of which we all stood in need. Then having on that day got a new sled and an Indian (Quaw), Alec and Johnny started back to Quesnelle for the caches. They left early this morning, Quaw going part of the way. He will return from cache No. 3 with articles (books, sextant, &c.) which we want here. Ogden leaves to-morrow for Stewart Lake and he will send down some dogs, dried salmon and sleds from there.

Salmon and dogs are scarce articles at Fort George, and as we want them, of course, the noble red man won't sell except at exorbitant prices. This shows that civilization has been making rapid strides among the Indians of British Columbia.

FORT GEORGE, Dec. 26th, 1874.

From the date of my last letter we spent the time reading, smoking and having a very comfortable time generally. Occasionally we took a walk on the river, which is frozen hard and very good travelling.

Getting ready for Xmas was a novelty. We helped Bovil to make a pudding, and he seems to understand the business perfectly. Christmas day was very cold indeed, but a very pleasant one nevertheless. We dined at 6 p.m., and

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I enclose a bill of fare, that you may know that we had grub, if other things were wanting.

Soup, clear, (a la Bovil.)

Fish, salmon, (*dried à la sauvage.*)

Piece de Resistance; roast working ox.

Entrees, turkey (*a la grouse.*)

vegetables, potatoes.

Plumpudding and brandy sauce, pipes, tobacco and ■ glass of brandy and water, to absent friends.

Since my last, we have had a few inches of snow, but the weather generally has been fine and very cold.

My dogs are as lively as crickets and are getting as much salmon as they will eat. The trip from Quesnelle galled some shoulders, but they are rapidly getting well under my care. A train dog isn't very loving but these are very fond of me--*at feeding time.*

FORT GEORGE, January 7, 1875

After 'Xmas we began to look for Alec everyday and finally to fear that he had fallen into the river which he was ordered to follow on his return. Our time was spent in taking long walks up and down the river and in cutting ■ trail around some open water ■ few miles above; the season is getting on and it begins to look ■ if we wouldn't get off before spring. Still we flatter ourselves that the "country is quite safe." To-day we started an Indian down the river to look up Alec, giving him orders to bring him dead or alive, so I hope we will hear something in a few days more. We are O.K., the dogs ditto. Bovil has ■ queer specimen of ■ cur which he fondly imagines is well bred. His dog's name is Jack, he doesn't know it himself, but Bovil says so. His obedience is really wonderful, when Bovil says "come here Jack," he starts at once to get under the bed, and then his master says, "that's right go and lie down under the bed, you beast," or else he gets the beast in one hand and a dog whip in the other, and makes music for the million. We are having some snowshoes and toboggans (dog sleds) made while we wait; ours are pretty well used up in the Quesnelle trip.

FORT GEORGE, January 13th, 1875.

On the 8th of this month, the day after we started the Indian to look for Alec, he returned having met the youth down the river a day's travel. Alec

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had a hard trip, having brought the dogs, sleds and loads up the river as far as 1st canon in a canoe. He then started up the river with the train, but the ice was very bad and he finally had to leave his load, the dogs being played out for want of grub. You see he had started from Quesnelle with six days' grub expecting to make quick time on the river. At Blackwater he got an Indian to help him and together the three packed a good part of the load up, one important part was a mail containing letters from home. The 8th was very cold,--47 degrees, but as I had given you a register already, I won't repeat all the thermometer readings in my letters. Alec and Johnny returned with fresh dogs the next day after arriving and brought up the sled, &c., on the 12th; between the 9th and 12th we had sent off a H.B. Co.'s servant to buy salmon for us, and on the 13th he arrived bringing with him a messenger from Ogden saying that the trains would be on hand in a few days. So we are now all ready to start on the Smoky River Exploration, and will leave tomorrow, I think. Before I give you an idea of how our loads, &c., are made up, I must tell you of a fight we had in the house this afternoon. We were sitting smoking quietly when the door opened and in walked an Indian, he made straight for Bovil, and before you could say "Jack," he hit at him with a hardwood club made for the purpose; fortunately Bovil caught part of the blow with his arm or it would have been the last of him, he then jumped up and grabbed the Indian and around the room they waltzed, each trying to get a good blow; at last I saw the Indian feel for his knife, so I took a hand by getting my dog whip and putting the handle into Bovil's hand. The handle is loaded you know, for the purpose of knocking down a refractory dog. Well, as soon as Bovil felt his weapon, he jumped back, broke away from the noble red, and gave it to him good. After that we had no trouble in dragging him to the door, where he remained some time after recovering, with the blood running down his face and his knife in his hand, ready to let daylight into our host. There was great excitement among the Indians, who gathered outside in crowds. Finally the savage was coaxed off and I was as glad as any one to see him go, tho' I had a good six shooter and I wasn't much afraid. It seems that an Indian boy had told stories, lies, about Bovil and some squaw, for which Bovil kicked him well, hence the row, in which the father sought to revenge the kicking of his son.

All's well that ends well, but Bovil better be careful with these brutes.

1876

DAWSON VISITS FORTS

George Mercer Dawson

In his report carried in *The Geological Survey of Canada 1876-77*, George Mercer Dawson swings back and forth across the central interior of British Columbia, touching Bella Coola, then travelling north east. His diary, as given here, retells visits to Fort Fraser, Fort St. James and Fort George. The Nechako, the river common to all these points, was then, and still is, a favoured river for canoeing. The flow of this river is now controlled by the Aluminum Company of Canada's dam program and Kemano water diversion tunnels. This last leg of his journey, to Fort George tells of passing the Chinlac Indian massacre site, now "designated" under the Archaeological and Historic Sites Protection Act.

George Mercer Dawson would become immortalized throughout Western Canada from cities, mountains, a glacier and a bay that are named after him and through the heritage of documented evidences both historical and geographical that he left. To look at him, however, one would not think him capable of one day of hard physical labour. Left hunchbacked, and for some time weakened, at the age of eleven by a severe illness, Dawson took advantage of the educational opportunities open to him. His own father, William Dawson, served for 38 years as principal of McGill University, and was knighted in 1884. His grandfather first had a successful shipping business in Pictou, Nova Scotia, and then a publishing firm in Montreal. It was in Pictou that George Dawson was born, in 1849. At 24 years of age he was appointed geologist-botanist to Her Majesty's British North American Boundary Commission, Chief Geologist and Paleontologist to the Geological Survey of Canada in 1875 and its first Assistant Director in 1883. His report to the government on the Geology and Mineral Resources of the 49th

Dawson

Parallel from Lake of the Woods in Ontario to the Pacific Ocean did much to make the potentialities of Canada known to the world at that time.

For twenty years Dr. Dawson surveyed, mapped and reported for the Geological Survey of Canada, from 1875 to 1895 when he was elevated to Director. Most of this exploring and mapping took place in British Columbia and the Yukon.

More than an eminent geologist, then, Dawson was also a surveyor, a geographer, an archeologist, a scientist, a cartographer, an ethnologist of note, an explorer, a keen naturalist, an able administrator, a prolific and authoritative writer in his field, and quite a poet when so moved.

There have been many tributes written to George Mercer Dawson. One of these is from a Presidential Address, British Columbia Historical Association Convention, Penticton, May 23, 1969 by Mabel E. Jordon, in her address, Doctor George--Father of Western Canadian Geology:

"His surveys achieved a high degree of excellence, his information was phenomenally complete and accurate, and notwithstanding his handicap he somehow managed to rival the Indians in surmounting extreme hardships in the wilds without complaint."

Another one, written when he died, comes from fond affection, by Clive Phillipps-Wolley, called *Ode to Doctor George*:

Hope she has fooled us often,
but we follow her spring call yet,
And we'd risk our lives on his say so
and steer by the course he set--
Down the Dease and the lonely Liard
from Yukon to Stikine--
There's always a point to swear by,
where the little doctor's been. . .
He loved his work and his workmates
and all as he took for wage
Was the name his brave feet traced him
on Northland's newest page--
That and the hearts of the hard-fists
though I reckon for the work well done--

Dawson

He who set the stars for guide lights
will keep him the place he won,
Will lead him safe through the passes
and over the Last Divide
To the Camp of Honest Workers
of men who never lied--
And tell him the boys he worked for, say
judging ■■ best they can,
That in lands which try manhood hardest,
he was tested and proved a man.

On arriving at Fort Fraser I found myself, owing to the time occupied in the difficult country between Gatcho Lake and that point, too late to keep my appointment with Mr. Cambie, who had left some days before. Through the kindness of Mr. Alexander, in charge of the Hudsons Bay Post, I was able, however, to obtain a re-supply of the more necessary provisions--there being, fortunately, sufficient flour and tea in the store--the loan of ■ fish-net, and ■ suitable dug-out canoe, with two Indians. Hiring an Indian boy to assist the packer, I sent him back for supplies to Blackwater Depot with such of the animals ■ were fit to travel, while we set out by water to examine Fraser and Francois Lakes in which, fourteen days were occupied...

...We reached Fort Fraser on our return, on the afternoon of September 20, and after making the necessary arrangements with regard to supplies and payment of Indians, I set out ■■ the 23rd by the trail to Stuart Lake, sending Mr. Bowman in a canoe to examine ■ part of the Nechacco south of Fort Fraser, where coal was reported to exist. The trail from Fort Fraser to Stuart Lake is used by the Hudson Bay Company, and is not in very bad order. According to my track-survey, a line drawn from Fort Fraser to Fort St. James on Stuart Lake, runs about thirty degrees east of true north, giving the lakes a relative position very different from that which they are made to occupy on the published maps. The distance between the two places I estimate at about thirty miles in ■ straight line. By following a north-eastward course from Fort Fraser, and then turning north, ■ route between the two forts could be made over low ground, but the trail running directly northward from Fort Fraser

Dawson

gradually rises, skirting for a few miles a low range of hills on the west, and then ascending more rapidly the southern slope of a high ridge which runs nearly east and west. A remarkable notch or gap in the crest of this ridge, called the Porte d'Enfer, conducts the trail across it, at an elevation of 3,790 feet. A descent is then made to the valley of a brook which runs westward, and a second broad-topped ridge next passed over at a height of 4,910 feet. Both these are covered with material resembling the boulder clay of my report of last year, and holding rolled and travelled stones. Gradually descending again to flat country, Whool-tan or Kwa Lake, and a small sheet of water known as Chaz-kan are passed, and the shore of Stuart Lake reached at the mouth of Sowchee Brook, a rapid stream about ten feet wide by six inches deep. *Abies lasiocarpa* is quite abundant on the two high ridges, while well grown Douglas firs, over three feet in diameter, and tall straight aspens occur near Stuart Lake. Its southern shore is bordered by tiers of moraine mounds. Little land suited to agriculture occurs on this route, but the low country to the east is seen to be very extensive, and appears to have a fertile soil.

At Fort St. James we found in Mr. Gayin Hamilton's garden fine cabbages, cauliflower, turnips, beets, carrots and onions, grown from seed in the open air without forcing. Barley and potatoes are grown on a larger scale, for use in the fort. In his flower garden, notwithstanding the rather severe frost of the evening of September 26th, a species of mallow, *mignonnette*, *mesembryanthemum*, portulaca and sweet-pea were still flourishing. On the evening of September 23rd, a light flurry of snow was experienced on the high ridges above mentioned, but fell in the form of rain at lower levels.

The vicinity of Stuart Lake is described more fully by yourself [Alfred Selwyn] in the report for 1875-76.

On the 2nd of October, I left Fort Fraser with two Fraser Lake Indians--Ja-sen and Be-ni-ta--to descend the Lower Nechacco in a canoe to Fort George, sending the pack animals by the trail to the same place. This portion of the river flows, for the most part, through a low fertile country, no high hills being visible in any direction. It offers some geological features of interest, which will be referred to elsewhere, but need not occupy much time in its general description.

About a mile below the junction of the Fraser Lake stream, a rather troublesome stony rapid occurs, with low cliffs of basalt at the sides. Low fertile-looking land borders the river for six miles from the same point, when the stream becomes contracted and rapid, and, suddenly turning northward, breaks through some low rocky hills. Three miles further on occurs a second rapid,

Dawson

with small rocky islets, and from this point to the junction of the Stuart River--■ distance of thirty-one miles in a straight line--the river, though making a few abrupt turns, in the main pursues a pretty direct course through a fertile country generally wooded with poplar, which seldom rises fifty feet above the water level on the upper part of the stream, but as the river descends, eventually appears to stand about 100 feet above it. Below the mouth of Sin-kut Creek, however, ■ few rounded hills, a little over 100 feet in height, occur on the south side.

The confluence of the Stuart and Nechacco Rivers is known to the Indians as Chin-lak. For nine and a-half miles below this, the ordinary flat country borders the stream ■ both sides, several lower benches extending between the river and the general level of the plain, generally with rather sandy soil. The river here turns northward, and describes ■ semi-circle in passing through ■ low range of rocky hills, on the east side of which is the Isle de Pierre Rapid, one of the worst in the river. From this place to the mouth of the Chilacco--a distance of twelve miles in ■ direct course--the river is rather crooked, and is depressed from 150 to 200 feet below the general level of the surface of the country. A mile above the Chilacco the Na-tsen-kuz or White-mud Rapid is formed by ■ projecting bed of basalt, underlain by soft Tertiary clays. From the mouth of the Chilacco to Fort George, at the confluence of the Nechacco and Fraser--ten miles--the river makes double this distance, in a great loop, with many minor convolutions. It is rapid throughout, and in many places shallow.

On the upper part of the Lower Nechacco many sections of the fine white silts, already referred to, occur. Below the mouth of the Chilacco these do not continue to appear, but seem to blend with thick beds of rounded shingle, which are shown in numerous cliffs at the convex bends of the river, and in one place, near Fort George, form the great gravel cliff, 200 feet in height, known to the Indians as Uz-us-ki-whal-kla, which is mentioned in last year's report. With this change in the character of the deposit, the soil appears to become less uniformly fertile.

At Fort George, wheat and grain of all sorts can be grown successfully. Very fine and large potatoes were being dug at the time of my visit, and on October 10th the stalks were frost-killed, with the exception of the lower leaves.

Having paid off my two Indians, I waited at Fort George several days for the pack-train, which finally arriving, we set out by the trail down the Chilacco River for Blackwater Depot and Quesnel.



Fort St. James 1875. Established in 1806 by Simon Fraser and John Stuart. National Archives of Canada /PA51024



Fort Fraser, 1876. National Archives of Canada/PA51053



Fort George, 1876. Located at the junction of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers. Established by Simon Fraser in 1807, would become the City of Prince George. National Archives of Canada /PA38066

1888

THE GREAT NORTH WEST

J. Turner Turner

Some of the accounts of early travel in the Central Interior of British Columbia stand out as being a comedy of errors: J. Turner Turner's book *Three Years Hunting and Trapping in America and the Great North West* was just that.

This copy is often ridiculous to the point of being hilarious. Some very awkward circumstances were recorded, graphically highlighting pitfalls that might be expected under unfamiliar conditions as this husband and wife team spend a winter hunting and trapping "six days journey" up the Fraser River from what is now Prince George, in a hastily constructed shanty the winter of 1888. Being inexperienced with hazards of this territory and ways to cope with them, the author spells out incidents that might have been left out by a more qualified woodsman.

The party consisted of the author, his wife (referred to in the book as L.) and Fred (the author's underkeeper for many years). Coming from Britain, they entered the interior of British Columbia by way of Victoria, Metlakahtla and Fort Simpson on the west coast. The trip from England had originally come about through interest generated in hunting on this continent when a friend visited London from Virginia.

J. Turner Turner's stated reason that brought about a return visit: "My financial exchequer, the constitution of which had been seriously undermined years before, after gradually sinking, suffered a final relapse, with the result that my place ~~was~~ let for two years and I, preferring a life in the great North-West to a doleful existence in England, now found myself en route for Vancouver Island."

Great Northwest

Here they are scouting for a place to build a cabin in total wilderness far up the Fraser River from Prince George:

Next day failing to observe that one spot held any advantage over another except ■ regards ■ southerly aspect, I told the Indians to land us at the foot of ■ mountain reported to be in the possession of a great quantity of grizzly bears, and, on that account, rarely visited by Indians. At twelve o'clock, without a word from the steersman, our canoe was run ashore, and never, I should imagine, in the annals of house building was a site more speedily selected. There where the canoe struck the bank we dug the steps, and at the top of the steps we built the shanty...

In two days the shell of our house was completed, and the Indians departed to fetch the remainder of our freight whenever it should arrive, leaving us monarchs of all we surveyed. Probably to those who have spent their lives in a comfortable abode, the completion of a house 25 ft. by 20 ft. such as we now possessed would seem ■ simple enough matter; true everything was simple, too simple in fact, the materials simple solid fir trees and mud from the river, tools--two axes, one auger, 10 lbs. of nails, a hammer, adze, handsaw and a double cross-cut saw, which refused to move in green timber, all these were simple enough; workmen two--one being very small, and the other equally indolent, constantly losing half-a-day or more by hunting, instead of working; under these circumstances, it is not very surprising, that the following took many weeks to complete, in spite of a certain amount of assistance from L., whose forte was stopping with moss, and mudding the chinks. Removing roots, and levelling floor, laying down the floor with small trees placed head and tails, and afterwards chopped down to their centres with the adze; fixing up partitions of small trees, so ■ to divide the shanty into three compartments; cutting windows and doors through solid green trees, fixing in the panes of glass, making doors out of slabs brought with us, front door four feet high, back door three feet two inches high, making rustic table and two chairs, collecting and carrying moss for stopping between logs and over roof, stopping and mudding all chinks, covering roof one-and-quarter feet deep with sand, no earth being procurable, and last, though by no means least ■ large fire-place to accommodate logs four feet long, built first of sediment, and afterwards of clay. Among these items only

Great Northwest

two real difficulties presented themselves, the first of which was the fire-place, not a stone lay within miles, it was therefore evident that a substitute would have to be relied on in the form of sediment from the river, this we made into bricks and baked, but they crumbled away at the slightest touch, at length after three days hard work, Fred carrying up the mud while I laid it on; a very imposing looking structure some five feet high was erected. After putting up the last dab for the day, I stood back to admire my handiwork, the most difficult portion the closing in preparatory to the erection of a chimney was completed; while thus wrapt in admiration, I beheld the whole mass slowly caving in, that last dab had done it, fool that I was not to have waited until the morrow, when it would have dried a little, rushing forward I clapped as much of my three days' labour as I could include in a tender embrace, but to no purpose, no one man could have kept that fire-place up, gradually but gracefully it fell, three days lost, and a sharp frost might come any night to prevent all further work with such materials, well, there was nothing for it but to pull down what remained standing, and recommence the work with clay, some of which we had noticed on our way up the river, but it was a considerable distance off, and we should require several canoe loads, it was, however, the last resource, so off we started next morning, returning with as much of the finest blue clay as we dared load the canoe with, it answered admirably, and in about a week an excellent fireplace was completed, the only fault being that the smoke declined to go up the chimney, at length after much coaxing and closing in with tin it only smoked a little and that not always, so that on the whole it was a satisfactory fireplace, but the other item, the roof, was ever a lamentable failure, in the first place the fall was insufficient, in the second there should have been a strong support running from end to end in the centre of the house to relieve the smaller trees composing the roof of a portion of the weight, for after piling on a foot and a half of sand, we dared throw up no more, the poles bending to an alarming extent. The first shower gave us an inkling of what we might expect when it rained, by quickly penetrating the porous sand, but when it really did rain, there was not a square foot unprovided with its own waterfall, the worst of it was that when it cleared up outside, it continued to rain two days more in doors, everything became mouldy, our blankets in spite of every precaution were constantly soaked, when the fire was lit in the day time, the whole place resembled a vapour bath, L. got rheumatic, the skins became mildewed, and everything that could spoil did so, had we even been able to procure earth it might have been better, every place we could think of was tried, the trees with the exception of birch would no longer bark, and that utterly declined to remain in any desired position, we covered it deep in spruce boughs,

Great Northwest

but they were worse than useless, to make shingles was out of the question, when finally I hit on ~~an~~ idea which I believed would successfully overcome the difficulty, off we set for more clay, a thin layer of which was spread over the entire roof, but a tremendous storm arose in the night and in the morning not a vestige of clay remained, this had been the expiring effort. We now could do no more than pray for the frost which was unusually late in coming, though it paid us a short visit on the 14th October by swooping down with 23 degrees for one night, and after a slight effort on the following, disappeared again in endless rains, these only ceased to give place to sleet and snow, which up to the end of November remained but for short intervals before melting. The frost being insufficient to admit of our standing on what remained of the muddy roof to remove the snow, it invariably filtered into the house...

Much to our relief two canoes shortly appeared with our provisions, &c.; but though they brought 50 lbs. of bacon and 24 lbs. of tinned meat, a quantity of things were still missing, which necessitated considerable extra expense by obliging us to have yet another canoe up, this when it finally arrived was nearly empty, except for 60 lbs. of coal oil instead of 200 lbs., 100 traps and a few other things, amongst which were mails eleven months old, together with a letter from Mr. Clifford, at the Forks, stating that one of the canoes containing our freight had been lost coming up the Skeena, amongst the various articles gone to the bottom, L. and I had each a special grievance, she by the loss of her riding habit, boots and only dress, under these circumstances she beheld herself compelled to return to Victoria a veritable squaw in a blanket, while I was considerably putout at the loss of implements without which I should be some 100 or more traps short, though I was duly thankful that 70 had been saved from the wreck. As a sort of compensation for the absence of many much needed articles, one of the few boxes brought by the last canoe on being opened was found to contain a melancholy collection of mostly broken china plates which did not belong to us, and had by some mistake been forwarded about 650 miles for our special benefit, how much the few unbroken plates had cost me I felt no inclination to figure out.

After a careful calculation we came to the conclusion that by using one instead of two lamps, and going to bed at eight o'clock, we might have oil enough for four months; the prospect was by no means cheerful, as it portended a very long time spent in bed, and even then should we fail to obtain the further supply, for which we had written to Mr. Ogden, the time must come when we should spend sixteen out of the twenty-four hours in darkness...



Rapid on Upper Nechako, south of Fort Fraser, 1876. National Archives of Canada/PA 37545



Terraces near Blackwater Bridge (the greater part of foliage removed for greater clearness).

1898

TO THE KLONDIKE

Hamlin Garland

Gold, once again, was the drawing card, in 1898; the Klondike attracted miners and 'would be' miners from around the world.

Fortunately for the reader, one of these miners was Hamlin Garland, an American author who would, in 1921, win the Pulitzer Prize for his book *A Daughter of the Middle Border*.

One of his lesser known works, however, was the *Trail of the Goldseekers*. It was published in 1899, and told of the journey he made, from Ashcroft, over the Telegraph Trail-Stikine-Teslin route. From his book, we learn what created the Klondike Gold Rush, his own motives in joining the rush, and about routes other than the fabled Chilcoot Pass. He describes the trip through the central interior with sensitivity and thoroughness. His experience in Journalism and poetry makes him a very observant traveller. He was not new to the trail, so he was comfortable in his role of chronicler. As he says, however, he was not a goldseeker really, so much as he was a nature hunter.

A little of this man's own life story might interest the reader. Hamlin Garland lived from 1860 to 1940. He was an american novelist and essayist, born in a pioneer log-cabin near the village of West Salem in Wisconsin. In 1869 his people moved to Iowa and he spent twelve years on a 'Middle Border' farm. After graduating from the Cedar Valley Seminary in Osage, Iowa, in 1881, he helped his father establish a new home in Ordway, S.D. and in 1884 he went to Boston to prepare for teaching American Literature.

He married in 1899, following his 'Klondike Saga,' told here:

Klondike

A little over a year ago a small steamer swung to at a Seattle Wharf, and emptied a flood of eager passengers upon the dock. It was an obscure craft, making infrequent trips round the Aleutian Islands (which form the farthest western point of the United States) to the mouth of a practically unknown river called the Yukon, which empties into the ocean near the post of St. Michaels, on the northwestern coast of Alaska.

The passengers on this boat were not distinguished citizens, nor fair to look upon. They were roughly dressed, and some of them were pale and worn as if with long sickness or exhausting toil. Yet this ship and these passengers startled the whole English-speaking world. Swift as electricity could fly, the magical word GOLD went forth like a brazen eagle across the continent to turn the faces of millions of earth's toilers toward a region which, up to that time, had been unknown or of ill report. For this ship contained a million dollars in gold: these seedy passengers carried great bags of nuggets and bottles of shining dust which they had burned, at risk of their lives, out of the perpetually frozen ground, so far in the north that the winter had no sun and the summer midnight had no dusk.

The world was instantly filled with the stories of these men and of their tons of bullion. There was a moment of arrested attention--then the listeners smiled and nodded knowingly to each other, and went about their daily affairs.

But other ships similarly laden crept laggardly through the gates of Puget Sound, bringing other miners with bags and bottles, and then the world believed. Thereafter the journals of all Christendom had to do with the "Klondike" and "The Golden River." Men could not hear enough or read enough of the mysterious Northwest.

In less than ten days after the landing of the second ship, all trains westward-bound across America were heavily laden with fiery-hearted adventurers, who set their faces to the new Eldorado with exultant confidence, resolute to do and dare.

Miners from Colorado and cow-boys from Montana met and mingled with engineers and tailors from New York City, and adventurous merchants from Chicago set shoulder to shoemakers from Lynn. All kinds and conditions of prospectors swarmed upon the boats at Seattle, Vancouver, and other coast cities. Some entered upon new routes to the gold fields, which were now known to be far in the Yukon Valley, while others took the already well-known route

Hamlin Garland *The Trail of the Goldseekers*, 1898, N.Y Macmillan.
Reproduced by permission of his two daughters, Constance Garland
Doyle and Isabel Garland Lord, Sherman Oaks, California.

Klondike

by way of St. Michaels, and thence up the sinuous and sinister stream whose waters began on the eastern slop of the glacial peaks just inland from Juneau, and swept to the north and west for more than two thousand miles. It was understood that this way was long and hard and cold, yet thousands eagerly embarked on keels of all designs and of all conditions of unseaworthiness. By far the greater number assaulted the mountain passes of Skagway.

As the autumn came on, the certainty of the gold deposits deepened; but the tales of savage cliffs, of snow-walled trails, of swift and icy rivers, grew more numerous, more definite, and more appalling. Weak-hearted Jasons dropped out and returned to warn their friends of the dread powers to be encountered in the northern mountains.

As the uncertainties of the river route and the sufferings and toils of the Chilcoot and the White Pass became known, the adventurers cast about to find other ways of reaching the gold fields, which had come now to be called "The Klondike," because of the extreme richness of a small river of that name which entered the Yukon, well on toward the Arctic Circle.

From this attempt to avoid the perils of other routes, much talk arose of the Dalton Trail, the Taku Trail, the Stikine Route, the Telegraph Route, and the Edmonton Overland Trail. Every town within two thousand miles of the Klondike River advertised itself as "the point of departure for the gold fields," and set forth the special advantages of its entrance way, crying out meanwhile against the cruel mendacity of those who dared to suggest other and "more dangerous and costly" ways.

The winter was spent in urging these claims, and thousands of men planned to try some one or the other of these "side-doors." The movement overland seemed about to surpass the wonderful transcontinental march of miners in '49 and '50, and those who loved the trail for its own sake and were eager to explore an unknown country hesitated only between the two trails which were entirely overland. One of these led from Edmonton to the Head-waters of the Pelly, the other started from the Canadian Pacific Railway at Ashcroft and made its tortuous way northward between the great glacial coast range on the left and the lateral spurs of the Continental Divide on the east.

The promoters of each of these routes spoke of the beautiful valleys to be crossed, of the lovely streams filled with fish, of the game and fruit. Each was called "the poor man's route," because with a few ponies and a gun the prospector could traverse the entire distance during the summer, "arriving on the banks of the Yukon, not merely browned and hearty, but a veteran of the trail."

Klondike

It was pointed out also that the Ashcroft Route led directly across several great gold districts and that the adventurer could combine business with pleasure on the trip by examining the Ominica country, the Kisgagash Mountains, the Peace River, and the upper waters of the Stikeen. These places were all spoken of as if they were close beside the tail and easy of access, and the prediction was freely made that a flood of men would sweep up this valley such as had never been known in the history of goldseeking.

As the winter wore on this prediction seemed about to be realized. In every town in the West, in every factory in the East, men were organizing parties of exploration. Grub stakers by the hundred were outfitted, a vast army was ready to march in the early spring, when a new interest suddenly appeared--a new army sprang into being.

Against the greed for gold arose the lust of battle. WAR came to change the current of popular interest. The newspapers called home their reporters in the North and sent them into the South, the Dakota cow-boys just ready to join the ranks of the gold seekers entered the army of the United States, finding in its Southern campaigns an outlet to their undying passion for adventure; while the factory hands who had organized themselves into a goldseeking company turned themselves into a squad of military volunteers. For the time the gold of the North was forgotten in the war of the South.

However, there were those not so profoundly interested in the war or whose arrangements had been completed before the actual outbreak of cannon-shot, and would not be turned aside. An immense army still pushed on to the north. This I joined on the 20th day of April, leaving my home in Wisconsin, bound for the overland trail and bearing a joyous heart. I believed that I was about to see and take part in a most picturesque and impressive movement across the wilderness. I believed it to be the last great march of the kind which could ever come in America, so rapidly were the wild places being settled up. I wished, therefore, to take part in this tramp of the goldseekers, to be one of them, and record their deeds. I wished to return to the wilderness also, to forget books and theories of art and social problems, and come again face to face with the great free spaces of woods and skies and streams. I was not a goldseeker, but a nature hunter, and I was eager to enter this, the wildest region yet remaining in Northern America. I willingly and with joy took the long way round, the hard way through.

1898

THE TRAILER'S Hamlin Garland

Who took the Ashcroft-Hazelton-Telegraph Creek-Teslin Route to the Klondike Gold Rush traversing the central interior of British Columbia? Why?

These are questions that Hamlin Garland attempts to answer in this next excerpt from *The Trail of the Goldseekers*.

When the party left Quesnel they followed the Collins Overland Telegraph Trail and Garland made an observation showing a unique sense of wilderness travel: "The trail was a white man's road. It lacked grace and charm. It cut uselessly over hills and plunged senselessly into ravines. It was an irritation to all of us who knew the easy swing, the circumspection, and the labor-saving devices of an Indian trail. The telegraph line was laid by compass, not by the stars and the peaks; it evaded nothing; it saved distance, not labour."

Still, he made the most of it:

About noon the next day we suddenly descended to the Blackwater, a swift stream which had been newly bridged by those ahead of us. In this wild land streams were our only objective points; the mountains had no names, and the monotony of the forest produced a singular effect on our minds. Our jour-

Hamlin Garland *The Trail of the Goldseekers*, 1898, N.Y Macmillan.
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Doyle and Isabel Garland Lord, Sherman Oaks, California.

Trailers

ney at times seemed a sort of motionless progression. Once our tent was set and our baggage arranged about us, we lost all sense of having moved at all.

Immediately after leaving the Blackwater bridge we had a grateful touch of an Indian trail. The telegraph route kept to the valley flat, but an old trail turned to the right and climbed the north bank by an easy and graceful grade which it was a joy to follow. The top of the bench was wooded and grassy, and the smooth brown trail wound away sinuous as a serpent under the splendid pine trees. For more than three hours we strolled along this bank — distinguished in those who occupy boxes at the theatre. Below us the Blackwater looped away under a sunny sky, and far beyond, enormous and unnamed, deep blue mountains rose, notching the western sky. The scene was so exceedingly rich and amiable we could hardly believe it to be without farms and villages, yet only an Indian hut or two gave indication of human life.

After a hard drive we camped beside a small creek, together with several other outfits. One of them belonged to a doctor from the Chilcoten country. He was one of those Englishmen who are natural plainsmen. He was always calm, cheerful, and self-contained. He took all worry and danger — — matter of course, and did not attempt to carry the customs of a London hotel into the camp. When an Englishman has this temper, he makes one of the best campaigners in the world.

As I came to meet the other men on the trail, I found that some peculiar circumstance had led to their choice of route. The doctor had a ranch in the valley of the Fraser. One of "the Manchester boys" had a cousin near Soda Creek. "Siwash Charley" wished to prospect on the head-waters of the Skeena; and so in almost every case some special excuse was given. When the truth was known, the love of adventure had led all of us to take the telegraph route. Most of the miners argued that they could make their entrance by horse as cheaply, if not as quickly, as by boat. For the most part they were young, hardy, and temperate young men of the middle condition of American life.

One of the Manchester men had been a farmer in Connecticut, an attendant in an insane asylum in Massachusetts, and an engineer. He was fat when he started, and weighed two hundred and twenty pounds. By the time we had overtaken him his trousers had begun to flap around him. He was known as "Big Bill." His companion, Frank, was a sinewy little fellow with no extra flesh at all, — an alert, cheery, and vociferous boy, who made noise enough to scare all the game out of the valley. Neither of these men had ever saddled a horse before reaching the Chilcoten, but they developed at once into skilful packers and

Trailers

rugged trailers, though they still exposed themselves unnecessarily in order to show that they were not "tenderfeet."

"Siwash Charley" was ■ Montana miner who spoke Chinook fluently, and swore in splendid rhythms on occasion. He was small, alert, seasoned to the trail, and capable of any hardship. "The Man from Chihuahua" was so called because he had been prospecting in Mexico. He had the best packhorses on the trail, and cared for them like ■ mother. He was small, weazened, hardy as oak, inured to every hardship, and very wise in all things. He had led his fine little train of horses from Chihuahua to Seattle, thence to the Thompson River, joining us at Quesnelle. He was the typical trailer. He spoke in the Missouri fashion, though he was ■ born Californian. His partner was a quiet little man from Snohomish flats, in Washington. These outfits were typical of scores of others, and it will be seen that they were for the most part Americans, the group of Germans from New York City and the English doctor being the exceptions.

There was little talk among us. We were not merely going a journey, but going as rapidly as was prudent, and there was close attention to business. There was something morbidly persistent in the action of these trains. They pushed on resolutely, grimly; like blind worms following some directing force from within. This peculiarity of action became more noticeable day by day. We were not on the trail, after all, to hunt, or fish, or skylark. We had set our eyes on a distant place, and toward it our feet moved, even in sleep.

RELENTLESS NATURE

She laid her rivers to snare us,
She set her snows to chill,
Her clouds had the cunning of vultures,
Her plants were charged to kill.
The glooms of her forests benumbed us,
On the slime of her ledges we sprawled;
But we set our feet to the northward,
And crawled and crawled and crawled!
We defied her, and cursed her, and shouted:
“To hell with your rain and your snow.
Our minds we have set on a journey,
And despite of your anger we go!”

Our thanks to the late Hamlin Garland for writing this poem and to his daughters, Constance Garland Doyle and Isabel Garland Lord for permission to use it. Taken from *The Trail of the Gold Seekers*.

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